Elements of social and applied psychology
J.E. Stockdale, B. Franks and C.M. Provencher

MN2079
2013

Undergraduate study in Economics, Management, Finance and the Social Sciences

This is an extract from a subject guide for an undergraduate course offered as part of the University of London International Programmes in Economics, Management, Finance and the Social Sciences. Materials for these programmes are developed by academics at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

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This is one of a series of subject guides published by the University. We regret that due to pressure of work the authors are unable to enter into any correspondence relating to, or arising from, the guide. If you have any comments on this subject guide, favourable or unfavourable, please use the form at the back of this guide.

Dedication

The 2013 edition of the subject guide is dedicated to the memory of A.E.M. Seaborne, BSc, MSc, PhD, formerly Lecturer in Psychology at The London School of Economics and Political Science, who made a major contribution to earlier versions of this guide.

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Publications Office
Stewart House
32 Russell Square
London WC1B 5DN
United Kingdom
www.londoninternational.ac.uk

Published by: University of London
© University of London 2013

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We would like to welcome you to the subject guide for **MN2079 Elements of social and applied psychology**. We very much hope that you will find its content both interesting and enjoyable and that it will help you to structure your studies and to perform well in the examination.

The subject guide is designed to lead you through the material. It offers direction about the range of topics to be covered and the important concepts, research findings and theoretical perspectives which link together to provide an understanding of social psychological principles and their application.

### 1.1 Route map to the guide

#### 1.1.1 Why study social and applied psychology?

Have you ever wondered how you form an impression of someone you are meeting for the first time? Or contemplated what kind of impression you give others? Or why you behave in one way when you are with a group of your friends and another way when you are with members of your family? Have you ever speculated about why someone reacted in what you considered to be an unexpected way? What about whether groups perform tasks better than people working alone or whether the decisions made by committees are different from those made by individuals? Or, what about the qualities needed to be a leader or the sources of satisfaction and stress that organisations provide to their employees? Have you considered whether we can apply what we know about human social behaviour to help understand people's decisions – for example, in consumer behaviour or friendship choices? Or, what about the impact of diversity – for example, gender and culture – on the effectiveness of an organisation and on the experiences of those who work there?

If you have ever asked yourself questions such as these or any other questions about the vagaries of human social behaviour, then you should enjoy studying social and applied psychology.

Social psychologists study a wide diversity of phenomena: they are interested in all aspects of thought and behaviour that are influenced by the real or imagined presence of other people. Social psychologists want to understand the processes that influence the way in which we construe social situations and behave within them. The fact that we are inherently social beings means that virtually all aspects of our lives, whether private or public, are affected by our dealings and relationships with others.

At one level we are all naïve or intuitive psychologists – we all have ideas about how people respond to social settings, why people do things, and how we are influenced by the presence of others. But, although commonsense may give us some insight into human social behaviour, social psychologists use scientific methods with the aim of gathering information about behaviour in a systematic and unbiased way. An appreciation of the principles and processes which underlie our social interactions can help us both to understand why people act in the way that they do and to address some of the issues which concern us in today's world.
One word of warning. Do not expect that studying social psychology will give you total insight into either your own behaviour or that of other people. People are very complex organisms and social settings often merely serve to accentuate this complexity. There may be several competing, and apparently equally valid, explanations for people's behaviour or, on certain occasions, someone's behaviour may defy explanation. Social psychology is still a young and developing discipline and there are numerous gaps in our knowledge and many unanswered questions. But, that is part of the fun and fascination of studying social psychology.

1.1.2 Aims of the guide
The subject guide aims to:
• provide a framework for the study of social and applied psychology
• introduce you to the relevant subject material
• present the material in a structured and accessible format
• guide you towards appropriate learning resources
• encourage you to take an active approach to learning by reading recommended material and undertaking learning activities and participating in discussion via the virtual learning environment (VLE).

The subject guide is not designed to be a self-contained text. This means that you will need to consult other learning resources. It is very important that you consult both the Essential readings and the supplementary material on the VLE in order to understand the guide's content. You will also benefit from referring to the Further reading.

1.1.3 How the subject guide is organised
The subject guide is divided into 20 chapters. These comprise an introductory chapter, 18 chapters organised into four sections and a concluding overview chapter.

Each of the central 18 chapters deals with a substantive area of social psychology or its application. As you read each chapter and associated sources, it is essential that you think about, and discuss with others, the material that you have read so that you develop your ability to think critically and imaginatively, learn to integrate theory and research findings, and apply what you learn to the world around you. The more actively you are involved in your own learning, the more enjoyable it will be and the more successful its outcome.

1.1.4 Outline of the chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction
In this chapter we provide an introduction to the subject guide, the subject area you will be studying and the course itself. We outline the role and aims of the subject guide and describe how the guide is organised. We provide advice on how to use the subject guide and the amount of time you should spend studying. We present an overview of the subject area and outline the course syllabus and aims. We give information about the learning resources available to you, highlighting the importance of reading a variety of sources and using the VLE to enhance your understanding.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Part A: What is social psychology?

Chapter 2: The scope and development of social psychology
In this chapter we examine the nature, scope and origins of social psychology. We identify factors which influence social behaviour and highlight some important topics addressed by social psychologists. We discuss the role of theory in psychological research, drawing attention to some key theoretical perspectives in social psychology. We also discuss some of the different emphases within social psychology, highlighting the importance of the social and cultural context in understanding social experience.

Chapter 3: Interrelations and applications
In this chapter we discuss how social psychology is connected to other subject areas, both within and outside psychology. We consider how theories, concepts and findings from social psychology can be used to try to understand real-world issues by focusing on two specific topics: stress and helping behaviour. We also highlight some of the challenges and benefits of applying social psychology to practical problems, especially in organisations and workplace settings.

Chapter 4: Research in social psychology
In this chapter we discuss the different kinds of research questions of interest to social psychologists and provide an overview of the various research methods used both in social psychology and in organisational and management settings. We draw a distinction between experimental and non-experimental approaches, highlighting their advantages and disadvantages. We describe the methods belonging to these two approaches, consider the kinds of data they generate and discuss the quality indicators associated with different types of research. We also highlight the nature and importance of ethical issues in conducting research.

Part B: Understanding the social world

Chapter 5: Identity and self-perception
In this chapter we consider how we see ourselves. We look at the ways in which social psychologists have understood components of the sense of self, types of knowledge about the self and the kinds of information people use to make sense of who they are. We consider some of the motivations underlying our sense of self and the maintenance of a positive sense of self. We also examine the origins and impact of errors or biases in our self-perception.

Chapter 6: Self-presentation and impression management
In this chapter we explore ways in which people’s concern with how they are seen by others affects the image they present. We consider the motives underlying self-presentation, the processes involved and individual differences in how far people seek to control the impression they make on others. We explore theoretical perspectives on impression management, highlighting the distinction between strategic and expressive self-presentation, and discuss common self-presentation strategies. We also discuss self-presentation in the context of social networking sites, such as Facebook.
**Chapter 7: Social perception and cognition**

In this chapter we consider how we perceive others and form impressions of what they are like. We go on to examine the role of cognition in understanding our social world, paying special attention to our reliance on categories, schemas and stereotypes to organise our social knowledge. We also illustrate how our use of heuristics – cognitive short cuts – and other cognitive strategies can lead to errors and bias in the judgements we make, both when processing social information and when making moral and economic decisions.

**Chapter 8: Attribution**

In this chapter we discuss the process of causal attribution – how people explain their own and others' behaviour. We consider theories of attribution, which seek to explain why people make the attributions they do, and their application to real-world settings. We examine the nature and origins of the errors and biases that people commonly make when attributing causes to behaviour. We also discuss links between attribution, culture and judgements of personal responsibility.

**Chapter 9: Attitudes**

In this chapter we examine the nature, formation and functions of attitudes and consider how they can be measured. We go on to explore the relation between attitudes and behaviour, highlighting the factors which affect whether or not attitudes are a good predictor of behaviour. We consider recent theories of the attitude-behaviour link and assess their predictive power. We also introduce you to social representations – shared understandings of our social world – which may aid our understanding of how people evaluate and act in social environments.

**Part C: Social influence**

**Chapter 10: Groups and group influence**

In this chapter we discuss what constitutes a group, and the nature and impact of group norms and cohesiveness. We examine how being in a group can affect both the effort people put into a task and task performance, and note how social settings can affect people's tendency to help others. We also consider how being in a large group, like a crowd can alter individual behaviour and lead to apparent contagion of thought, feeling and action.

**Chapter 11: Decision making, conflict and strategic interaction**

In this chapter we examine how group decision making compares with decisions made individually and highlight the conditions which can lead to defective decisions in social and economic settings. We also consider sources of, and solutions to, conflict arising in situations where individuals or groups are faced with apparently incompatible goals, and in social dilemmas where the individual's goals and those of the group differ. We explore the nature of strategic interaction and negotiation, highlighting the factors which determine whether people choose to compete or cooperate when faced with a conflict of interest.

**Chapter 12: Conformity, compliance and obedience**

In this chapter we consider different scenarios in which social influence can occur, the factors affecting the influence exerted and the processes involved. We explore the nature of conformity, examining both the
different paradigms used to investigate conformity and the factors that affect the extent to which people conform to a majority. We introduce you to the processes involved in conformity – normative, informational and referent informational influence – highlighting the difference between private and public conformity. We consider minority influence and its role in generating social change. We examine compliance, highlighting factors that lead to its occurrence and its association with different types of power. We also consider factors affecting obedience and discuss the practical and ethical implications of experimental work on obedience.

Chapter 13: Attitude change and persuasive communication

In this chapter we consider techniques of attitude change and persuasion. We examine how the impact of persuasive communication varies with the message content, the characteristics of the person presenting the message and those of the audience. We discuss the merits of competing theoretical explanations, highlighting the importance of dual-processing models of attitude change in explaining how we respond to persuasive messages. We also assess the value of cognitive dissonance theory in explaining attitude change.

Chapter 14: Consumer behaviour and marketing

In this chapter we discuss how social psychological concepts and theories, such as those associated with persuasive communication, emotions and the notion of the extended self, are used in marketing and consumer psychology. We illustrate how the principles of attitude change and persuasion may be applied to advertising, and discuss techniques used to influence consumer choice. We then look at how brand identities are developed and explore how purchases, particularly of branded goods, contribute to defining the self. We also consider the role of social media and the impact of culture on advertising and marketing.

Part D: Social relations

Chapter 15: Prejudice and discrimination

In this chapter we examine the meaning of prejudice and discrimination and identify their common targets. We explore the impact of prejudice and discrimination on both individuals and society. We discuss how social psychological factors contribute to prejudice and consider the relation between prejudice and inter-group conflict. We evaluate key theories about the origins of prejudice, emphasising the importance of stereotyping and group identifications in generating prejudice and inter-group conflict. We discuss the role of societal factors in generating prejudice, highlighting the role of cultural norms and the media. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how prejudice and discrimination might be reduced.

Chapter 16: Interpersonal attraction and relationships

In this chapter we examine the range of attributes that makes people attractive and increases our liking for them. We explore how we form and maintain relationships with others, highlighting the role of love and close relationships in people’s lives. We discuss theories of attraction, highlighting the factors that predict relationship satisfaction. We explore common problems in close relationships and what happens when relationships break down. We also consider how culture affects interpersonal attraction and close relationships.
Chapter 17: Communication
In this chapter we examine processes of communication, both at interpersonal and corporate levels. We discuss language, paralanguage and non-verbal cues, and the role of communication in the context of relationships and cultural transmission. We explore the role of the internet and social networking in communication. We also consider the nature and role of communication in the context of organisations, looking particularly at corporate identity, corporate social responsibility and reputation management.

Chapter 18: The world of work
In this chapter we explore how social psychology may be applied to organisations and other workplace settings. In particular, we examine a number of organisational issues, such as organisational culture and group dynamics. We consider workplace experiences, highlighting the nature of job satisfaction and theories about its determinants. We also explain the nature and impact of leadership, theories about what makes an effective leader and cultural variation in leadership behaviour.

Chapter 19: Diversity in organisations
In this chapter we examine the nature and impact of diversity in organisations, focusing particularly on gender and culture. We consider how gender has been theorised and examine some key concepts, such as gender roles and gender stereotypes. We explore cultural differences, highlighting the distinction between collectivist and individualistic cultures. We then look at how these sources of diversity relate to people's experience of and opportunity in organisations, illustrating how diversity can affect recruitment, promotion and career development. We also expand the analysis to consider the relation between diversity in organisations and concepts such as multiculturalism, intercultural contact and globalisation, concluding with a discussion of the challenges and benefits of a diverse workforce.

Chapter 20: Overview and perspectives on the future
In this final chapter we provide a brief summary of the subject guide content and consider the future development of social psychology and its applications.

1.1.5 How to use the subject guide
• Read through the text of the chapter.
• Then read those parts of the essential texts that are recommended in that chapter. We strongly recommend that you also read some of the supplementary material that is suggested as Further reading. You will find specific advice on what sources to read throughout the chapter in the form of 'stop and read' notes.
• As you read, think about the issues that are raised in the text. In each chapter there will be specific activities and exercises for you to complete – these are designed to help you to understand key issues and to achieve the planned learning outcomes. But also think about any other questions that come to mind and try to relate these questions to experiences in your own society.
• In each chapter, identify the key theorists and researchers – for each topic there will be a small number of names that it would be useful for you to be able to recall.
• Think about the sample questions at the end of the chapter. These are designed to test your knowledge and understanding and they are similar to those in Section A of the examination paper. Then draft answer plans and write down how you might answer each of the sample questions. Writing things down is a good way of structuring your thoughts and also helps you to find out whether you understand the relevant concepts, theories and empirical research.
• When you have finished studying a chapter, completed the associated reading and answered the sample questions, look at the reminder of the learning outcomes at the end of the chapter. These list the key skills and knowledge that you should be able to demonstrate having studied the chapter. Check your knowledge and understanding and make sure that you are able to do what is expected of you.
• We advise you to read the chapters in the order that they are presented in the guide, as later chapters build on the material introduced in earlier chapters.
• Try to link the subject guide chapters as you study. Although the material in the subject guide is divided into discrete ‘chunks’, this is designed to make the material more digestible, and it is a mistake to think of the chapters as self-contained units, unrelated to each other.
• The chapters are designed to introduce you to key concepts, theories and research in social and applied psychology. If you work your way through the subject guide, follow the recommended readings and complete the associated activities both in the subject guide and on the VLE, you should be ready to take the examination.

1.1.6 Key terms
At the end of each chapter you will find a list of key terms. These will be useful as index entries or search terms if you choose to consult titles suggested as Further reading or other relevant texts or online sources. Also, after completing the chapter and relevant reading, we suggest that you try to outline the essential features of each of the key terms in order to check that you have understood the material. If you are unclear about any of the key terms listed, we suggest that you go over the material again.

1.1.7 Recommended study time
Obviously, the time needed to study Elements of social and applied psychology will vary from student to student and so it is difficult to give precise guidance. However, were the material in this subject guide to be presented as a university lecture course, then we would expect each chapter to require up to three hours of lectures and two hours of seminar discussion to cover the relevant material. This equates to five contact hours per chapter. As an International Programmes student, you should expect to spend at least twice this amount of time working independently. This time will be spent reading the recommended material, undertaking learning activities, participating in discussion via the VLE and attempting sample examination questions to test your knowledge and understanding. The total amount of study time is estimated, therefore, to be about 10 hours per chapter; this equates to some 200 hours for the course. In addition, you will need to devote additional time to revision and preparation for the final examination. In total you should expect to spend between 250 and 300 hours studying Elements of social and applied psychology.
1.2 Introduction to the subject area

1.2.1 Introducing social and applied psychology

There are numerous definitions of social psychology, but a commonly quoted definition is that proposed by Allport (1954, p.5): ‘the scientific investigation of how the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others.’ So, social psychology takes a scientific approach to studying how humans think, act and react in social settings. It constructs theories about how our social world works; from these it generates predictions or hypotheses, which are then tested using experimental methods. This approach involves the collection of data, which are used to determine whether the theory gives the best possible explanation of the research findings or whether the theory requires modification in order to do so. Although experimental methods continue to be important in modern social psychology, there is increasing use of non-experimental methods which seek to describe people’s behaviour or views, or to explore how people’s responses are associated with their personal characteristics.

Another way of thinking about social psychology is in terms of the range of topics studied by social psychologists. As you will see from the content of this course, the list is extensive. It includes everything from attribution to attitudes, conformity to conflict, persuasion to prejudice, self-presentation to stress, and zero-sum games to xenophobia. However, it is important to recognise that many of the topics of interest to social psychologists are also of interest to those working within related disciplines, such as sociologists, social anthropologists, economists or management theorists. Social psychology is made distinctive by virtue, not just of the phenomena that are studied, but how they are studied and the ways in which such phenomena are explained.

Increasingly, social psychologists have come to recognise that although the study of an individual’s thoughts, feelings and actions is a core aspect of social psychology, there is a need to pay more attention to the environment, its culture and its institutions - that is the more social aspects of social psychology. This shift in emphasis has led social psychology to take a broader perspective and to adopt a more outward-looking approach to the study of the way social life functions. This means considering the social settings, organisations and institutions that shape our outlooks and actions and appreciating the interdependence of individuals and their socio-cultural context. Although the dominant focus of this course is on the way individuals understand and deal with their social world and are affected by their social and cultural experiences, we shall also make reference to the more social or societal approach to social psychology.

Elements of social and applied psychology provides an overview of key areas of social psychology and their application. Social and applied psychology are wide-ranging subjects and the course is necessarily selective in its coverage. However, it aims to address issues of both theoretical interest and practical importance, thereby aiding our understanding of how people behave, think, interact and communicate in social settings.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) accredits psychology programmes in the UK. Its guidelines specify the major topics which should be covered within social psychology. These topics are listed below, together with the chapter(s) in the subject guide where each is covered most fully.
### BPS guidelines

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#### 1.2.2 Course content and structure

There are no formal prerequisites to take this course but some of the concepts to which you will be introduced will resonate with those you may have encountered in courses in statistics and sociology.

The course is designed to introduce you to some of the major theories and research findings within social and applied psychology. It comprises four elements:

**Part A: What is social psychology** provides an overview of the scope and development of social psychology, highlights its linkages with other subject areas and illustrates how social psychology can be used to understand real-world issues. This section also outlines the major research methods used in social psychology.

**Part B: Understanding the social world** focuses on how we see both ourselves and others, how we present ourselves to others, how we acquire and organise social knowledge and how we interpret our own and others’ behaviour. This section also introduces the notion of attitudes and explores how they relate to behaviour.

**Part C: Social influence** considers the nature of groups and how they affect people's behaviour, such as task performance and decision making. It then discusses conflict and strategic interaction and examines various forms of social influence, including conformity, compliance and obedience. This section also considers the processes involved in attitude change and persuasion and their application to consumer behaviour and marketing.

**Part D: Social relations** examines various aspects of social interaction, ranging from interpersonal and inter-group relations to interaction in workplace settings. It begins by considering the origins and impact of prejudice and discrimination. It then explores interpersonal attraction and relationships, before discussing interpersonal and corporate communication. This section also explores issues such as leadership and job satisfaction, and examines the nature and impact of diversity in organisations, focusing particularly on gender and culture.
The logic of this division into four elements is simple. The subject guide begins with an introduction to some of the key principles of social psychology, supported by illustrative examples of how some of these principles can be applied. This is followed by an exploration of how we acquire, organise and use knowledge about our social world. Then we consider how other people influence how we feel, think and respond in social situations. Finally, we look at various aspects of how we react negatively to others, form relationships and communicate, and behave in organisational settings.

However, any division is to some extent arbitrary and it is important to recognise that many, if not all, of the various aspects of social and applied psychology covered in this course are interlinked. This means that some topics are mentioned in more than one section, but often with a different slant reflecting the particular emphases of the chapters in which they are discussed.

The full syllabus for the course is detailed in Appendix 1.

### 1.3 Aims of the course

This course has five key aims and these relate directly to the major themes that will be emphasised in this subject guide. The course aims to:

- provide an overview of the scope of social psychology and its major methodological approaches
- identify the key ideas and processes people use in understanding their social world
- assess the impact of group membership and social influence on people's behaviour
- evaluate the role of social relations in our societies
- illustrate how social psychological knowledge and principles can be applied to real-world issues, especially in organisational and management settings.

### 1.4 Learning outcomes

At the end of this course and having completed the Essential reading and activities students should be able to:

- describe key concepts, theories and methodological approaches used in social psychology
- outline the processes used in understanding our social world
- assess how people behave in groups and the role of social influence
- analyse the processes and phenomena involved in social relations
- critically evaluate how social psychology can be applied to social issues and can aid our understanding of human behaviour in real-life settings, especially those involving organisational and economic issues.
1.5 Overview of learning resources

1.5.1 Study materials

As a student of the University of London International Programmes, you have access to a range of study materials. The subject guide is the core resource providing academic direction and guidance. However, it is not a textbook and it should not be seen as the sole source of knowledge about social and applied psychology. Rather, by dividing the course content into a coherent and systematic plan of study, it offers a framework for studying the syllabus.

So, you may find it helpful to think of the subject guide as a lecture series, with each of the chapters serving to: highlight key information and ideas; signpost Essential and Further reading; and identify activities and exercises to enhance your understanding of the chapter content. It is crucially important that you follow the recommended reading and make full use of associated VLE material. In order to derive maximum benefit from your studies you should not rely just on the subject guide. The guide complements the other learning resources available to you and should not be seen as a substitute. You need to read as widely as possible and to use the additional learning resources and discussion opportunities available on the VLE. The reading and other activities that you undertake will form the basis for your own notes, which will be an essential part of your studies.

There is no single text that covers all the material included in the subject guide. We have therefore identified two essential texts for the course but you are not expected to buy them both. There are also optional supplementary sources. You will find it helpful to read these and other relevant sources, including articles in the media, particularly those which relate social psychology to issues which are important within your own countries and communities. Many of the concepts and principles will be clearer if you can see how they relate to your own society.

1.5.2 Essential reading

Two main texts have been selected for this course:


Both of these textbooks provide a review of the main areas of social psychology. Hogg and Vaughan provide a clearly written but critical overview of the subject area and the book is particularly strong on explaining both theories and research. It is also the more comprehensive of the two texts. Sanderson provides a very accessible introduction to the field and is particularly useful in helping you to understand connections between social psychology and its applications.

Either book would be suitable for purchase. Which one you choose will depend on the coverage you require and the style of writing and format you prefer. Even if you choose not to purchase one of these texts, you will need to consult both of them during your studies.

Detailed reading references in this subject guide refer to the editions of the textbooks listed above. New editions of one or both of these textbooks may have been published by the time you study this course. You can use a more recent edition of either of the books; use the detailed chapter and section headings and the index to identify relevant readings. Also check the VLE regularly for updated guidance on readings.
1.5.3 Further reading and references cited

As long as you read the Essential reading you are free to read around the subject area in any text, journal article or online resource. You will need to support your learning by reading as widely as possible and by thinking how you can apply your knowledge to real-world issues. To help you read extensively, you have free access to the University of London Online Library and the VLE. A complete list of all the Further reading and references cited is provided on the VLE.

The most frequently cited Further reading texts are:


1.5.4 Online Library

Those Further reading sources and references cited which are asterisked (*) in the subject guide and in the list on the VLE are available in the Online Library.

1.5.5 Virtual learning environment (VLE)

There is a range of support material – videos, discussions, exercises etc. – on the VLE and you are strongly advised to use these resources. You can access the VLE via the Student Portal at: http://my.londoninternational.ac.uk

1.5.6 Web links

When reading around a topic, you are advised to consult a range of different resources, including sites on the world wide web. Some useful sites are listed below.

1. Psychology and social psychology societies

- American Psychological Association: www.apa.org
- American Psychological Society links page: www.psychologicalscience.org/about/links.html
- Asian Association of Social Psychology: www.sites.psych.unimelb.edu.au/aasp
- Australian Psychological Society: www.psychology.org.au
- British Psychological Society: www.bps.org.uk.

2. Glossaries/dictionaries/encyclopaedias

- Online glossary/dictionary of psychological terms (1): www.richmond.edu/%7Eallison/glossary.html
- Online glossary/dictionary of psychological terms (3): www.alleydog.com/glossary/psychology-glossary.cfm
- Encyclopaedia of psychology: www.psychology.org/
3. Social psychology textbook support sites
   http://catalogue.pearsoned.co.uk/educator/product/Social-Psychology-with-MyPsychLab/9780273741145.page
   www.wiley.com/college/sc/sanderson/home.html

4. Social and applied psychology resources links
   Specific relevant web links are cited in each chapter.
   Other web resources include the following:
   Introductory material on both theorists and concepts is available at: www.simplypsychology.org/simplypsychology-index.html
   A regular e-list from the BPS of interesting and/or topical recent research; requires registration: www.bps.org.uk/publications/rd.cfm
   Applied psychology and social psychology resources: www.vanguard.edu/faculty/ddiegelman/amoebaweb/
   Social psychological resources: www.socsciresearch.com/r9.html
   Social Psychology Quarterly: www.stanford.edu/group/spq
   Society for Personality and Social Psychology: www.spsp.org
   Social psychology teaching and learning resources (1): http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow/
   Social psychology teaching and learning resources (2): www.oklahoma.net/~jnichols/teaching.html
   Presentations and discussions of classic and important publications in psychology: http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/
   Thorough discussion of social influence, attitude change and many other issues in applied social psychology: http://changingminds.org/
   News from a social psychological perspective: www.units.muohio.edu/psybersite/news/

Notes:
1. For any specific topic, you should look at any appropriate links and pages listed on the sites under all four headings above.
2. Websites do occasionally close down: their listing here is not a guarantee that a site will be functioning should you try to access it. Unless otherwise stated, all websites in this subject guide were accessed in March 2013. We cannot guarantee, however, that they will stay current and you may need to perform an internet search to find the relevant pages.
3. You should also try entering the key words for the topic in which you are interested into an internet search engine: for example, http://scholar.google.com/ attempts to search through academic sites and pages only.
4. Not all websites originate from reliable sources and can therefore be misleading. The sites listed above are generally reliable and accurate; other sites may be less so.
1.6 Examination advice

**Important**: the information and advice given here are based on the examination structure used at the time this guide was written. Please note that subject guides may be used for many years. Because of this, we strongly advise you to always check both the current Regulations for relevant information about the examination and the VLE where you will be advised of any forthcoming changes. You should also check the rubric/instructions on the paper you actually sit and follow these instructions.

1.6.1 Format of the examination

The course is assessed by a three-hour unseen written examination which comprises four sections. You should answer four questions from Section A (10 marks each) and two questions from Sections B, C and D, with not more than one question from any of these three sections (30 marks each).

Questions in Section A can come from any area of the syllabus. Section A is designed to enable you to demonstrate your grasp of some of the key concepts, methods and theories in social and applied psychology. For each of the four questions answered from Section A, you are expected to write one to two pages.

Sections B, C and D each relate directly to the three substantive areas of the course. The questions in Section B relate to understanding our social world, those in Section C relate to social influence and those in Section D relate to social relations. It is important to note that questions in each of these sections may also relate to relevant material covered in Part A of the subject guide. For each of the two questions answered from Sections B, C and D, you are expected to provide well-structured, essay-type answers. These will normally be between three and four pages in length.

You will find a Sample examination paper in Appendix 2 at the end of the guide. This is accompanied by an Examiners' commentary (Appendix 3) which provides detailed guidance on how to approach each of the questions.

You will also find valuable advice on studying and preparing for your examination in Strategies for success.

1.6.2 What are the Examiners looking for?

**Elements of social and applied psychology** covers a wide range of topics: theoretical perspectives and research methods; understanding the social world; social influence; and social relations. The examination paper reflects the breadth of the syllabus and requires candidates to have a knowledge of at least two of the three substantive areas as well as a general understanding of the key issues.

Section A (short questions) and Sections B, C and D (essay questions) require different approaches.

In Section A, which covers the entire syllabus, the Examiners are looking for evidence that you have understood the relevant material and that you can present this knowledge clearly, with appropriate reference to relevant theorists and research findings. A good answer need not exceed one to two pages in length (depending on the size of your writing).

Sections B, C and D are seeking evidence that you not only understand the issues but that you can also present your ideas in a coherent and structured way, express and argue your viewpoint and support your arguments with empirical evidence. Although questions are not marked on the basis of length, it is difficult to get high marks for very short answers.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.6.3 What does the examination test?

The examination tests a range of competencies, including:

- ability to analyse the question and understand what is being asked
- understanding as well as knowledge
- breadth of reading
- capacity to draw on relevant material
- familiarity with key issues/debates and major theories
- ability to construct arguments
- ability to support arguments appropriately – by citing relevant theories/research findings
- ability to select/evaluate evidence
- analytical/critical skills
- clarity of expression
- time management.

So, the examination is not just a test of how much you can remember of the material presented in the subject guide. Rather it is a test of your understanding of social and applied psychology, gained from reading a wide range of sources, and of your ability to apply your knowledge and insight to answer the questions posed on the examination paper.

You will get credit for your knowledge and understanding of the issues and your ability to:

- present your ideas and arguments in a coherent and structured way
- support your arguments with empirical evidence
- analyse and integrate material
- be critical and to weigh up the evidence for competing explanations
- relate issues raised in this course to your own society
- apply the principles and processes you have encountered to practical issues and real-world concerns.

1.6.4 Preparing for the examination

- Make sure that you start your revision in good time so that you are familiar with the material when you go in to take the examination. This will allow you to focus on using the material to answer the questions rather than spending your time on trying to recall the relevant information.

- When you are revising, take an active approach. For example, summarise key points, identify major theorists, relevant empirical evidence and essential arguments and practise short answers and essay plans. You will find it helpful to practise answering past essay questions within the time limits set.

- When preparing for the examination, think about what the examination is assessing – it is not just a memory test and so do not memorise sections of the subject guide or past essays you have written.

- Do look at past Examiners’ commentaries as these contain valuable information about how to approach the examination. Make sure that
you understand both the Examiners’ guidance on how to approach a particular question and their comments on what makes a good or excellent answer and on common mistakes and weaknesses.

• Do make sure that you revise sufficient topics to enable you to answer the requisite number of questions on the examination paper. Question spotting can be very dangerous and, remember, some questions may require knowledge of more than one topic.

1.6.5 The examination: key steps to improvement

Plan your time

• When you sit down to take your examination, read through the whole examination paper before you start to write. Make sure that you read the questions carefully.

• Plan your time wisely, dividing your time appropriately among the questions. Allow five minutes for reading the questions carefully and selecting the questions you will answer.

You should then allow approximately:

• 60 minutes to answer four questions from Section A (i.e. about 15 minutes per question)

• 55 minutes for each of the two questions you select from Sections B, C and D.

• Use any time you may have left over to read through your answers and to correct any errors or add anything you realise that you have omitted.

• It is very important that you allocate your time appropriately such that you are able to answer the required number of questions. It is easier to get some of the marks on all of the questions than all of the marks on some of the questions. This means that it is very difficult to get a satisfactory mark if you fail to answer the correct number of questions. Examiners can mark only what is written on the script – they cannot give marks for blank pages. If you only answer two short questions rather than four, or only one essay-type question rather than two, you will lose many marks.

Answer the question asked

• Read the questions carefully – a common mistake is to focus on one word or phrase in the question rather than working out what the question is asking.

• Make sure that you answer the question set, rather than writing all you know about the topic to which the question relates.

• This is especially important for Sections B, C and D where you not only need to have a good understanding of the relevant material but also the ability to select relevant material and use it to construct an answer that addresses the issues raised by the question.

• Also, you need to ensure that you answer the question on the paper rather than the one you wish had been on the paper! For example, you will get zero marks if you answer a question using information about the attitude-behaviour link when the question asked you to discuss attribution.

• Most people find it helpful to plan their answers to questions requiring essay-type answers – it helps them to structure their answers and to keep focused on the question that they are addressing.
Cite empirical evidence

- In all sections, you should make reference to relevant theorists and research findings where appropriate.
- If you know the name of a relevant theorist/researcher, then do cite them. Similarly, if you know the date of the theory or research to which you are referring then include that too. Typically, there will only be a handful of key names and dates for each substantive area.
- If you cannot remember the names and/or dates, then you can refer to theorists or researchers and the approximate time period when the work was conducted. For example, ‘the major theory in the 1970s suggested that...’ or ‘researchers in the 1960s found that...’.
- Relating issues to your own society can be valuable.
- However, if you are using examples from your own society as evidence for or against a particular theoretical approach, these examples should be in the public domain – personal anecdote is not sufficient.

Draw on your background reading

- The subject guide provides a framework for studying social and applied psychology – it should not be seen as providing a sufficient basis for performing well in the examination.
- You need to read beyond the subject guide and incorporate the additional reading into your answers.

Develop your argument

- You are expected to develop your argument in the context of the question asked.
- This means that you should not just regurgitate the material in the subject guide.
- Your approach needs to be critical and analytic, rather than merely descriptive.
- Questions frequently ask you to evaluate a theory or to compare two or more explanations. Do not be afraid to use your critical judgement when weighing up the evidence for competing accounts.

Structure your answer

- You should not leave it to the final paragraph of your answer to outline your argument.
- The introductory paragraph should set the scene by identifying key issues and outlining your argument.
- You need to develop and substantiate the argument in the main body of the answer, demonstrating critical insight and citing appropriate empirical evidence.
- Do not simply list theories and/or phenomena. You should aim to relate each theory or phenomenon to the argument you are developing and you should highlight the most important issues.
- You should use paragraphs and address one main issue in each. One way of doing this is to introduce the topic in the first sentence of the paragraph, then add relevant knowledge in the following sentences and conclude or ‘wrap up’ the paragraph by linking the point you are making to the argument you are developing. You might expect to have three or four paragraphs per page.
• In the final paragraph of your essay, you should draw your ideas together, summarise the main points of your argument and provide a conclusion on the basis of the material you have covered. It can be helpful to relate your conclusion back to the introductory paragraph, demonstrating that you have presented the argument that you planned to put forward.

• However, there is no single correct way of answering a question – equally good answers may be structured in contrasting ways.

1.7 Overview

You do not have to read every word of the essential texts or all of the Further reading suggested in the subject guide. You may find some topics more interesting and/or more difficult than others. This may mean that you do more work on some chapters than on others – the choice of how you distribute your available study time is yours.

But, it is important to recognise that the subject guide is just that – it is an introduction to a wide-ranging subject area and is not designed to be comprehensive. Remember that the subject guide is there to direct your learning about social and applied psychology and is not a set of examination notes. It does not, by itself, contain sufficient material to enable you to achieve a good mark in the examination.

It is essential that you support your learning by reading as widely as possible and by thinking about how social psychological principles apply in the real world. To help you read extensively, all International Programmes students have free access to the University of London Online Library where you will find either the full text or an abstract of many of the journal articles listed in this subject guide. Further details can be found in your Student handbook or online at: http://my.londoninternational.ac.uk

Do prepare thoroughly for the examination – plan your revision, allow sufficient time to cover the relevant material and practise answering questions within appropriate time limits. You need to go into the examination confident that you will do yourself justice.

The guidance provided in this introductory chapter is designed to ensure that you enjoy and benefit from studying Elements of social and applied psychology and that you perform to the best of your ability in the examination. We very much hope we have achieved our aim and that you attain your current and future goals.
Part A: What is social psychology?
Notes
2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we provide a brief history of psychology and examine the nature and development of social psychology. We trace how psychology has changed from the study of mental experience through the science of mental life to the scientific study of behaviour and the thoughts, feelings and motivations underlying such behaviour. We highlight the way in which the interplay of theory and research is fundamental to the development of social psychology and identify some of the different emphases in the discipline.

2.1.1 Aims

The aims of this chapter are to:

• trace the development of social psychology and assess its current nature and scope
• illustrate the interplay of theory and research in the development of the discipline
• identify some of the different emphases in social psychology.

2.1.2 Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• describe the nature and development of social psychology
• outline the current scope of social psychology
• provide examples of the range of factors that influence social behaviour
• discuss the role of theory in social psychological research and the development of the discipline.

2.1.3 Essential reading


2.1.4 Further reading


2.1.5 References cited


2.1.6 Synopsis of chapter

This chapter provides a brief overview of the origins and development of social psychology. The subject began to emerge as an independent entity early in the 20th century but it was in the 1930s that social psychology became firmly established. Since then, social psychology has developed as
a discipline in its own right and has expanded to encompass all forms of social interaction. Within social psychology, empirical research provides us with a range of insights into people’s behaviour and the factors that affect it. Theory plays an important, pivotal role in such research, generating research questions and predictions to be tested, and the resulting interplay of theory and research is fundamentally important to the development of the discipline. Social psychology has developed in somewhat different ways in the United Kingdom and other countries in Europe, compared with the USA, and this has not only led to lively debate, but has also contributed to an increasing recognition of the need to consider cultural context when discussing the origins of social behaviour.

2.2 What is psychology?

Defining any field of study is a difficult task and psychology is no exception. One of the simplest and clearest definitions is that offered by Miller (1966): ‘the science of mental life’ but there has been an increasing tendency to define psychology as ‘the scientific study of behaviour and its causes’, while recognising that ‘behaviour’ includes not only public actions which can be observed, but covert behaviours such as thoughts, images and feelings. This change of emphasis has been brought about both by the realisation that thoughts and other internal processes can be scientifically studied and by the increased availability of techniques for doing so. The goals of psychology are thus to describe the nature of behaviour and mental processes, understand the conditions under which they arise, and explain what causes them, thereby contributing to their modification.

The range of topics covered by psychology is very wide and includes some which have engaged the attention of most people, such as, ‘How can I learn efficiently?’ and ‘How do I raise children effectively?’, as well as more specialised issues such as, ‘How do brain states influence consciousness?’ and ‘How can phobic behaviour be modified?’ Virtually all of us are interested in some of these processes and want to make sense of them; and to that extent we are all lay psychologists.

But, whereas most people develop their understanding of human behaviour and experience by casual observation, psychologists set out to collect evidence using rigorous and systematic procedures in order to derive verifiable conclusions.

Psychology is one of a family of disciplines, referred to as the social sciences, which seek to analyse human behaviour objectively and to identify consistent behavioural patterns. While there are similarities in approach among the social sciences, there are also important differences of emphasis. Of all the social sciences, psychology relies most heavily on scientific observation and experimentation, but it is also the most personal in that it focuses more on individuals and processes within the individual.

Activity 2.1

List three activities you have carried out today and consider which psychological processes were involved.

Here is an example: reading the newspaper.

In order to read the newspaper you have to be able to see the newsprint, but more importantly you have to be able to translate the symbols on the printed page into words and understand their meaning and syntax. This requires that you have acquired the ability to read through a variety of complex cognitive processes, including perception, learning, memory, thinking and reasoning, and their biological underpinnings. The ability to read
is also affected by a range of individual differences or personal characteristics, such as mental abilities and personality factors, by environmental and situational factors, such as the guidance and stimulation received from your teachers, family and others around you. Some of these factors become clearer when we think of people who cannot read.

There are three main reasons why a person may not be able to read. First, they may be too young. Babies and small children cannot read, even if exposed to teaching, because their brains have not developed sufficiently. Second, there are people who have never learnt to read because they have not been to school or given the opportunity to learn in some other way; this emphasises the role of experience in being able to read. Finally, there are some people who are of appropriate general intellectual level, and have been to school, but who seem unable to acquire the ability to read because of a specific learning disability; an obvious example is dyslexia. This disability illustrates how atypical neurological development can affect the acquisition of particular behavioural skills.

But, of course, how you interpret what you read will also depend upon your past experience and your social knowledge system – the beliefs you have about the world around you, your emotional reactions to others and events – and your interpretation may not be the same as those around you. It will also be influenced by your family, community and social values. This leads us to a consideration of social psychology, the particular branch of psychology with which we are concerned in this course.

2.3 What is social psychology?

The complexities of definition are accentuated in the case of social psychology by its diversity and rapid rate of change. The literature offers a range of definitions of this sub-discipline of psychology. For example, as highlighted in Chapter 1, social psychology was defined by Allport (1954) as ‘the scientific investigation of how the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others.’


This definition, of course, emphasises how we are affected by others. But we also relate to, and influence, other people, and later definitions have tended to lay stress on how our social and cognitive processes affect the way we perceive, influence and relate to others.


Activity 2.2

Take a copy of today’s newspaper and find three articles where behaviour may have been influenced by the actual, implied or imagined presence of others.

So, the major aim of social psychologists is to understand the variety of factors that affect the actions of individuals in a wide range of social settings. For example, our beliefs, attitudes and feelings affect how we see ourselves and others and the inferences we draw about those with whom we interact. How we behave is influenced by the characteristics of the social setting quite apart from, or in addition to, how we may feel at the time. We are also affected by our social relationships, our cultural values and the groups to which we belong (whether or not other members of those groups are present).

Activity 2.3

Identify some of the factors which affect the following instances of social behaviour.

1. Giving a presentation – for example, to fellow students, to colleagues at work or at a public meeting.
2. Expressing your opinion about something you have read in the newspaper or seen on the television to someone you do not know very well.

3. Forming an impression of someone you have met for the first time.

Let us take an example. Think about taking people out for a meal. What factors might affect how you behave in this social situation? You are likely to behave differently depending upon:

- How well you know the people – you are likely to be more relaxed with people you know well.
- Whether or not you want to impress them – if you do want to make a positive impression, you are likely to adopt certain strategies to ensure this is the impression they gain.
- The setting – the style of restaurant, how good the food is, the cost of the meal and so on.
- The kind of day you have had – whether you are happy or stressed.
- How your guests behave – whether they are outgoing and talkative or quiet and difficult to talk to.

2.4 The origins and current scope of social psychology

Social psychology emerged as an independent entity early in the last century, with the publication of two texts containing the words ‘social psychology’ in their titles. The first, by William McDougall, published in 1908, took the view that social behaviour was determined by a small number of innate tendencies or instincts, a view which is not supported by most social psychologists today. The approach taken by the second, written by Floyd Allport and published in 1924, is much closer to that adopted by social psychology as we now know it. Allport argued that social behaviour originates from and is influenced by a range of factors including the presence and behaviour of others. Perhaps most importantly, this text reported research which had been conducted on topics such as recognising emotions from facial expressions, social conformity and the impact of audiences on task performance. Social psychology became firmly established during the 1930s with the development of the systematic investigation of these and other topics.


Since the Second World War, social psychology has expanded into virtually every area of social interaction. Underlying recent developments in social psychology have been three major themes. The first has been an increasing emphasis on using our knowledge of cognitive processing to understand the complexities of social phenomena. This emphasis has developed from the information processing approach in which human mental processing is compared to the operation of a computer. In this approach, the environment is characterised as providing input of data which are then processed, interpreted, represented in memory and applied. These mental processes, which enable us to gain knowledge and understanding, are known as cognition, while social cognition focuses more specifically on how people select, interpret, remember and use information to make judgements about themselves and their social environment. Social cognition thus plays a central role in understanding how people perceive and interact within their social world (see Chapter 7).
The second theme has been the recognition of the importance of culture and its impact on social psychological phenomena. Although social psychologists agree as to the significance of culture, there are different interpretations of its meaning. Peng, Ames and Knowles (2000) identify three different approaches to the study of culture adopted by cultural psychologists.

The value tradition defines culture in terms of the values held by people. One major proponent of this approach has been Hofstede, whose research into cultural differences in work-related values is outlined in Chapter 18 (Section 18.5). According to the self tradition, culture can be defined in terms of the way people think about who they are (i.e. the notion of self). This tradition goes back to the work of Markus and Kitayama, whose ideas are explored in Chapters 5, 6 and 19. The theory tradition derives from the more recent interest of cultural psychologists in the folk theories shared by members of different cultures (i.e. the beliefs, assumptions or implicit theories that characterise different cultures). According to this tradition, such implicit theories affect the way people perceive and respond to their social world, thereby generating culturally-specific behaviour.

Peng et al. (2000) note how research conducted within each of these three traditions has highlighted the existence of cultural variations in basic cognitive phenomena (e.g. social inference, causal attribution, impression formation) once thought to be universal. Such research has helped social psychologists to understand the plurality of everyday thinking and to recognise that phenomena once regarded as cognitive biases or deficits are more usefully seen as expressing cultural variation. The influence of culture on the processes underlying the various social psychological phenomena considered in this subject guide is discussed at the end of each chapter.

The third discernible trend in the recent development of social psychology is an increasing interest among social psychologists in analysing current social problems and applying their knowledge to practical issues, such as organisations and workplace settings. This trend is related to the close links which have developed between social psychology and other subject areas, both within and outside psychology. These linkages have led to the emergence of exciting interdisciplinary research areas, including social neuroscience and behavioural economics (see Section 3.2).

These three trends reflect an increasing awareness of the need both to draw on our knowledge of basic psychological theory and research and to recognise the importance of people's cultural context in order to help understand the complexities of our social world.

2.5 The role of theory

2.5.1 The interplay of theory and research

How do social psychologists choose what to study? Observation of our social world often generates questions which are translated into research. The many aspects of social interaction, which are intriguing and sometimes surprising, frequently stimulate research to try to find out more about them. Moreover, each research study itself tends to give rise to more questions than it answers.

One of the most important sources of research in social psychology is theory. Ultimately the goal of social psychology goes beyond describing
social behaviour; it seeks to explain behaviour and to understand why people behave in social situations in the way that they do. Social psychological theories are conceptual frameworks or sets of ideas which help us to understand and to guide the process of discovering new facts about our social world. The majority of theories within social psychology are relatively narrow in scope and have different domains of application; social behaviour does not lend itself easily to simple, all-embracing theories. However, there are areas where contrasting explanations are offered by different theories. When this happens, research is carried out to produce evidence for one or other of the theoretical approaches.

Although theory plays a major role in social psychological research, Howitt (1991) considers that there are other drivers to research activity and suggests that research falls into three categories:

- ‘Pure’ or basic research which is aimed at producing general ‘laws’ of thought or behaviour – for example, what issues arise when we try to recall information from our long-term memories?
- (Simple) applied psychology, which is aimed at applying theories and knowledge to real-world contexts, and so the research agenda is set by ‘pure’ research and theory – for example, how does the unreliability of our recall of information from long-term memory affect eyewitness testimony?
- Social policy research, which is aimed at informing policy choices of governments or other decision makers, and so the research agenda is set by policy issues and external agencies – for example, how can the style of questioning of crime suspects, victims and witnesses be modified to compensate for the unreliability of recall and thereby enhance the likelihood of achieving a just outcome?

So, having carried out basic research into a phenomenon, theoretical perspectives will be developed and tested and this in turn will lead to policy questions.

2.5.2 An illustrative example - aggression

An example of the development of a research agenda is provided by attempts to understand aggression.


We can all think of instances of aggression; some we see as relatively trivial – for example, shouting at someone or cutting in on another vehicle when driving – while others we regard as shocking and outrageous – for example sexual or physical assault or murder. While it has been argued that the key characteristic of aggression is the ‘intent to harm’ (Carlson, Marcus-Newhall and Miller, 1989), defining aggression remains problematic, perhaps not surprisingly given the wide range of behaviour that is seen as aggressive. Researchers have therefore focused on developing operational definitions of aggression (i.e. they define aggression in such a way that it can be manipulated and measured).

Once researchers have operationalised aggression, they can test theoretical accounts of why it occurs. There are a range of theoretical accounts which have been examined empirically. For example, Bandura (1973) argued that children learn to be aggressive through the process of socialisation, whereby they are directly rewarded or they observe others apparently being rewarded for such behaviour. Bandura used a variety of experimental settings to assess the predictive power of his
theory. In one classic study, Bandura and his colleagues tested whether observing someone being aggressive affected children’s subsequent behaviour (Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1963). They compared the behaviour of four- to five-year-old children who had previously observed adults behaving aggressively towards an inflatable ‘Bobo’ doll (live, on videotape or in cartoon form) with the behaviour of children who had no such exposure. The results showed that children who watched an adult behave aggressively behaved more aggressively when they were left to play with the doll. That is, they modelled their behaviour on the adult behaviour they had seen previously, for example punching or hitting the doll. This was true for all three of the conditions, but the most effective for modelling aggressive behaviour was the ‘live’ condition.

Social learning theory has generated a wealth of research. For example, the finding that children have the capacity to acquire aggression when the adult was observed behaving aggressively not only ‘live’, but also on videotape, directly increased research into the impact of violent acts in the visual media (e.g. films, television, videogames) on both children and adults. However, social learning theory cannot explain the full range of aggressive behaviour which has led to further theoretical developments. For example, the idea that aggressive behaviour is shaped by aggressive scripts (i.e. guidelines for deciding whether or not to display aggressive behaviour in specific situations). If children have routinely responded (or seen others responding) to provocation, such as threat or frustration, by showing aggression, they are likely to develop an aggressive script which leads them to respond to provocation with aggression. Research has also examined a variety of other factors with the capacity to precipitate aggressive behaviour. For example, whether people behave aggressively is affected by their alcohol consumption, the ambient temperature or feeling crowded and cultural norms and values. One way of dealing with the fact that no one theory or factor can explain aggression in all its complexity is to develop an integrative framework. This approach is reflected in the general aggression model (GAM) proposed by Anderson and Bushman (2002) which helps us to understand how personal and situational factors lead to aggressive behaviour via cognitive appraisal and negative affective arousal.

This example illustrates the interplay of theory and research – theory generates research which, in turn, stimulates theoretical development. This then generates more research and the cycle continues until researchers are satisfied with the explanatory power of the theoretical framework they have generated. However, the cycle will begin again if new evidence leads them to question existing explanations.

**Activity 2.4**

Think about the way you interact with your friends and family and focus on any social situation in which their behaviour or reactions to you were unexpected. Now think about what happened and try to answer the following questions:

1. What was surprising or puzzling about their behaviour?

2. Why did you find their behaviour puzzling? What would you have expected them to do in the circumstances?

3. Why do you think they behaved as they did? For example, was there anything about the social setting that might have influenced their behaviour? Alternatively, are you aware of anything that had happened previously that might have affected their reactions on this occasion? Or, can you think of any other explanation?

4. How might you test whether your explanation of their behaviour is correct?
2.6 Different emphases in social psychology

2.6.1 Historical underpinnings

Many of the central topics of social psychology, such as the study of attitudes, the effect of group membership on individual behaviour and attribution theory, had their origin in the USA. To a large extent, much of the social psychology studied and researched in the world originates from the USA. There are a number of reasons for this. Although psychology, and social psychology, began in Europe, the discipline was seized on with enthusiasm in the USA where the greater resources and more extensive commitment to higher education ensured its rapid growth (along with many other scientific and scholarly pursuits).


In addition, social psychology was eclipsed on the continent of Europe (excluding the United Kingdom) during the Second World War. Many practitioners fell foul of fascist regimes, both before and during the war, and a significant number of influential social psychologists emigrated to the United Kingdom and the USA.

After the war, there was a resurgence of work in social psychology, much of it in the US tradition (i.e. proceeding on the basis of rigorous experimentation and having as a theoretical basis the functioning of the individual). But some developments in Europe followed a different path. These developments emphasised the social dimension of social psychology.

The articulation of these two emphases – the individual and the social – within social psychology is a matter of fundamental debate and has led to the development of two distinct forms of social psychology: psychological social psychology and sociological social psychology, with common roots but different ancestors (Farr, 1991; 1996).


2.6.2 Psychological and sociological forms of social psychology

Psychological social psychology focuses on the cognitive structures and processes of individuals. This approach emphasises the primacy of individual processes and functions in explaining the operation of social systems and reflects the pre-eminence of the individual in the US and British tradition of psychological research.

Sociological social psychology emphasises the determining function of social systems, institutions and groups for individual behaviour. This approach derived from the belief that a theory of society should be the starting point for social psychological theorising and the growing concern following the Second World War that social psychology in Europe was too reliant on the US tradition. Social psychologists, such as Tajfel and Moscovici, considered that the social psychology that was developing at that time was too individualistic, too behaviourist and too dependent upon a particular methodological approach – the laboratory experiment – where individuals were divorced from their social context. Such concerns led to the argument that social psychology must include theoretical and empirical analyses of the relations between individual psychological functioning and social processes and structures which shape this functioning and are shaped by it (see Tajfel, 1981; 1982; Moscovici, 1972). This perspective resulted in work on topics such as stereotypes, prejudice, inter-group behaviour and social influence.
However, concerns about the status of social psychology remained and contributed to a major crisis of confidence and period of heightened self-doubt in the late 1960s and 1970s. Worries about the progress and maturity of the discipline of social psychology focused on several issues. One was whether the social psychological research then conducted was ethical – there was particular concern about the use of deception. Another issue was the extent to which laboratory research was affected by artefacts such as experimenter effects – outcomes resulting from cues to the hypotheses under investigation, inadvertently given by the experimenter. There were also concerns that social psychology was overly reductionist – that is, by explaining social psychological phenomena mainly in terms of individual psychology, it failed to address the essentially social nature of human experience.

An associated worry was that social psychology was overly positivistic – that is, it adhered to a model of science that was inappropriate for the study of people’s social lives and for gaining insights into their subjective experience. For example, Gergen (1973; 1976) claimed that behavioural data are dependent upon their cultural and historical context.

These criticisms have produced some radical alternatives to traditional social psychology, such as social constructivism, discourse analysis and critical social psychology.

- Social constructionism argues that we create our social reality through our actions and the ways in which we describe and interpret those actions. According to this perspective, ‘facts’ are dependent upon the language communities in which they are generated and any description of the nature of reality is dependent upon the cultural and historical locations of that description. So, actions, meaning and words create how we see and deal with the world.

  Stop and read Gergen (1985) for a brief introduction to social constructionism within psychology.

- Discourse analysis refers to a variety of different approaches to the study of texts – put another away, discourse analysis involves the identification of patterns within language in use. All of these approaches reject the idea that language is merely a neutral way of describing or reflecting the world. Rather, they take the view that discourse is of fundamental importance in constructing social life.

  Stop and read Gill (2000) for an overview of discourse analysis.

- Critical social psychology involves questioning assumptions which are taken for granted, especially our notions of power, inequality and difference, and searching for ways in which social psychology can help people to achieve greater freedom and fulfilment.

  Stop and read Gough, McFadden and McDonald (2013) for an introduction to critical social psychology.

These, and other innovative approaches, differ from one another but share an emphasis on understanding people as whole human beings who are constructed historically, embedded in their social and cultural context, and who try to make sense of themselves and their world.

2.6.3 Societal psychology

This stress on the importance of the social and cultural context in understanding social experience underpins the idea of societal psychology which focuses on the study of social phenomena, institutions and culture and their relation with members of society. Himmelweit (1990) argued
that different cultural priorities and styles will affect how political, legal, educational and other institutions develop and how individuals think, feel and behave. Also, the same behaviour can have very different meanings depending upon the cultural context. For example, people born into and socialised to function in an individualistic, self-contained culture, such as North America or Britain, are likely to be different from those belonging to a collective, embedded culture, such as Singapore, Thailand and other countries in South East Asia (see Section 5.8).

A fundamental tenet of the societal perspective is acceptance of the need to make social psychology more outward looking – studying individual thoughts, feelings and actions can be very valuable, but if social psychology is to realise its full potential, we need to appreciate the importance of the social and cultural dimensions in human experience. One consequence of this emphasis on social experience and the need to see people in the societal and cultural context in which they live, is the emergence of new research methods. These methods tend to emphasise the production of qualitative data that takes as its starting point the subjective experience of the participant and relates it to the societal conditions under which such experience is generated. (See Section 4.4 for a discussion of such methods and Section 4.5.1 for an assessment of the challenges they create for assessing the quality of research.)

## 2.7 Overview

Social psychology is the scientific field which seeks to understand the nature and causes of social behaviour. It is the field of psychology which examines how our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are influenced by other people. Others influence us, not only when they are physically present, but by their implied or imagined presence. Although informal observation of social behaviour and speculation about its origins has gone on since time immemorial, the scientific study of social behaviour emerged only in the early part of last century. Once established as an independent field of study, within the broader discipline of psychology, it expanded rapidly and now seeks to examine all aspects of social behaviour. There has also been a growing emphasis on the application of social psychological principles to significant real-life problems.

Much social psychological research is guided by theories which are logical frameworks designed to explain why certain psychological phenomena occur. Theories are used to generate hypotheses which are tested in research. The theories are then modified in the light of the research findings and new research is initiated, which in turn feeds back into the social psychological theory.

However, social psychology now embraces not just psychological social psychology which emphasises the primacy of individual behaviour – the view that dominates the North American tradition – but also sociological social psychology. This form of social psychology, which derives from Europe, emphasises the social and cultural bases of social experience and has led to the development of both new subjects of study and innovative research methods. Many of these methods are not based on the premises of scientific social psychology; rather they seek to understand how people themselves experience and make sense of their social lives.
2.8 Key terms

These key terms will be useful as index entries or search terms if you choose to consult titles suggested as Further reading or other relevant texts or online sources. After completing the chapter and relevant reading, we suggest you try to outline the essential features of each of the key terms listed below in order to check that you have understood the material. If you are unclear about any of the key terms listed, we suggest you go over the material again.

Psychology definitions

Social psychology definitions

History of social psychology

Social psychology theory

Research in social psychology

Psychological social psychology

Sociological social psychology

Societal psychology

2.9 Reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter and the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• describe the nature and development of social psychology
• outline the current scope of social psychology
• provide examples of the range of factors that influence social behaviour
• discuss the role of theory in social psychological research and the development of the discipline.
2.10 Test your knowledge and understanding

1. What is psychology and what distinguishes psychology from other social sciences?
2. What is social psychology and what are the aims of social psychologists?
3. What role does theory play in social psychological research?
4. What are some of the key features of societal psychology?
Chapter 3: Interrelations and applications

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we examine how social psychology is related to other fields within psychology, such as health psychology and industrial-organisational psychology, and to subject areas outside psychology, such as management and economics. We consider how theories, concepts and findings from social psychology can be used to try to understand real-world issues by focusing on two specific concerns: stress and helping behaviour. We also highlight some of the challenges and benefits of applying social psychology to practical problems, especially in organisations and workplace settings.

3.1.1 Aims

The aims of this chapter are to:

• explore how social psychology is related to other subject areas, within and outside psychology
• consider how theories, concepts and findings from social psychology can be used to help understand real-world issues, specifically:
  • stress and its impact
  • why, and under what conditions, people help others
• highlight some of the challenges and benefits of applying social psychology to practical problems.

3.1.2 Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• describe how social psychology is related to other subject areas, both within and outside psychology
• discuss how theories, concepts and findings from social psychology can be used to help understand real-world issues, specifically:
  • stress and its impact
  • why, and under what conditions, people help others
• identify some of the challenges and benefits of applying social psychology to practical problems.

3.1.3 Essential reading

Helping others


3.1.4 Further reading

Stress and its impact

Chandola, T. Stress at work. (London: British Academy, 2010). Available at: www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Stress-at-Work.cfm


Helping others


3.1.5 References cited

Social neuroscience


Cognitive biases


Stress and its impact


Helping others


3.1.6 Synopsis

This chapter discusses how social psychology is connected to other subject areas, both within and outside psychology. Two scenarios are used to illustrate how social psychology may be applied to understand real-world issues: stress and its impact, especially in the workplace, and helping behaviour. The chapter also highlights some of the challenges and benefits of applying social psychology to practical problems. Since stress and workplace experience are not covered in the Essential reading, you will need to consult the Further reading to ensure adequate coverage of these topics.

3.2 Linkages with subject areas within and outside psychology

Social psychology is linked both to other areas within psychology and to subject areas outside psychology. Understanding these linkages is important if we are to appreciate the range of potential applications of social psychology and thereby maximise its contribution to our understanding of real-world issues.

Within psychology, social psychology is linked to a range of areas, including: personality, clinical psychology, counselling psychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, health psychology and industrial-organisational psychology.

Stop and read Sanderson (2010) pp.15–16 for a discussion of how social psychology is linked with personality, clinical and cognitive psychology. See also Gilovich et al. (2013) p.8.

For example, social and personality psychologists share an interest in how people react to situations. However, while personality psychologists are more concerned with variations in people’s psychological make-up and how such individual differences affect how people feel and behave, social psychologists are more concerned with how social situations affect how people react. Social psychologists are also interested in certain aspects of individual differences which result in people reacting to different scenarios in distinct ways. For example, people who pay a lot of attention to the impression they are creating (i.e. they are high self-monitors) react differently to those who are not interested in others’ opinion (i.e. low self-monitors) (see Section 6.7).

Another example of where there is an overlap of interests is that between social and health psychologists. Both are interested in how we might change people’s health-related behaviour to improve their physical health and psychological well-being. For instance, social psychologists often work with health psychologists to identify triggers to smoking and excessive consumption of alcohol or food and to develop strategies for promoting more appropriate behaviour. They also share an interest in understanding how people react to, cope with and recover from illness.

A further example is industrial-organisational psychology, where practitioners in this field and social psychologists have a common interest in how psychological theories and principles - many of them from social psychology - may be applied to organisations. For instance, both fields are concerned with the nature and impact of organisational leadership, barriers to workplace productivity and efficiency, and worker attitudes, such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Moreover, the agendas of social psychologists, health psychologists and industrial-organisational psychologists all coincide in that they share an interest in the factors affecting stress at work and its impact on the well-being both of employees and of the organisation (see Section 3.3.4).
Social psychology is also linked to a number of subject areas outside psychology, including biology, economics, sociology, anthropology and management. In many cases, these linkages have led to the development of interdisciplinary research areas, such as social neuroscience and behavioural economics.

**Stop and read** Sanderson (2010) pp.16–19 for a discussion of how social psychology is linked to sociology, biology, anthropology and economics. Sanderson also devotes a section of each chapter to a neuroscience research study. See also Gilovich et al. (2013) pp.26–27.

Biologists are interested in many of the same issues as social psychologists but, with their focus on genetic, neurological and related mechanisms underlying behaviour, they use a different level of analysis. The connection between social psychology and biology has been reinforced in recent years by an increasing focus on evolutionary psychology, an approach that seeks to combine insights from evolutionary biology with those from social psychology. The key idea is that the human mind and the social relations that it supports have been influenced by our evolutionary past as much as has the human body. Our social and cognitive mechanisms are seen as adaptations to problems faced by our ancestors. Two evolutionary pressures are most pertinent to social psychology. One is sexual selection (the theory that evolution can occur through mating advantage that is based on out-competing rivals from the same sex, and being preferentially chosen as a mate by the opposite sex). Another is parental investment theory (that the sex that invests more effort in producing and nurturing offspring – the female – is likely to be more choosy in mate selection than the sex that has lower minimal investment, since it has more to risk from making a bad choice). Emerging from these ideas is the prediction of a difference between males and females in terms of the factors that can contribute to success in mate selection. While status, prestige and reputation will be important social psychological contributors to whether a male is viewed as a plausible potential mate, qualities that signal fecundity are more likely to have a role in whether a female is viewed as a plausible potential mate.

The connection between social psychology and biology has also been highlighted by the development of social neuroscience, which uses the methods of neuroscience to explore the origins of social behaviour. Neuroscience involves investigating which brain locations are activated, and to what extent, when carrying out cognitive processes (Fiske and Taylor, 2007). Social neuroscience focuses on brain activation when individuals process social information (e.g. which brain locations are typically activated when an individual is given a task that elicits thinking in terms of stereotypes), while cultural neuroscience examines consistencies and differences in activation patterns among people from different cultural backgrounds (see Ames and Fiske, 2010).

So, social neuroscience examines how different features of our social environment are associated with brain activity and how neural processes influence attitudes and behaviour, with the aim of uncovering the micro patterns of brain process and structure inside the individual which underpin social psychological phenomena. Social neuroscience depends heavily on the use of brain-imaging technology – in particular, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). The results of social neuroscience studies are often simplified in visual presentations or images that show different areas of the brain in different colours, reflecting the degree to which they are activated in response to the presence or absence of a stimulus.

The goal of the methods used in social neuroscience is to enable researchers to locate the neural pathways and mechanisms connected to a range of cognitive processes, whose role in social cognition then influences a number of social processes. As a result of such research, social neuroscience aims to provide a means of choosing between competing theories of the cognitive processes underlying social psychology. However, we should be wary of assuming that social neuroscience will provide answers to all of the questions facing social psychology.

For example, as will become clear from this subject guide, social psychology tends to explain thought and behaviour by taking the whole person as the main focus of explanation – this is very much in accordance with everyday, commonsense explanations. But, neuroscience encourages explanations of social psychological phenomena, not in terms of the person as a whole, but in terms of the part of the person’s brain that is activated when processing information in a social context. Hence, it has been argued that neuroscience may commit a ‘mereological fallacy’ of confusing the role of a part of the person with the whole person (Bennett and Hacker, 2003). If social psychology principally involves whole person level explanations, then social neuroscience may offer only partial insights.

There are also reasons to be cautious in interpreting the results of social neuroscience, especially as they are presented in the media, where visual presentations of brain imaging results are increasingly commonplace. Research has shown that people may be more convinced by the way that the argument is communicated than by the quality of the argument itself (see Chapter 13) and McCabe and Castel (2008) found precisely this effect when neuroscientific explanations are presented for psychological findings. Supplying an image of the brain alongside the explanation increases the persuasiveness of that explanation in comparison with explanations accompanied by bar charts or no additional information, even though the image adds no further weight to the explanation itself. McCabe and Castel suggest that this effect arises because the images offer a physical basis for the abstract concepts of psychology. From the viewpoint of social and applied psychology, such a finding indicates a need for caution in interpreting neuroscience in general and reports using images in particular.

A further example of how social psychology is linked to other subject areas involves economics, which analyses how people make trade-offs between scarce resources and how they choose among various options. In recent years, these two fields have increasingly converged, such that researchers often work on similar – or the same – problems. For instance, psychologists and economists have both worked on what is called ‘bargaining’ or negotiation (see Chapter 11, especially Section 11.3) and on what are referred to as ‘public goods problems’ in economics and ‘social dilemmas’ in psychology (see Chapter 11, especially Section 11.4). The convergence between the two fields reflects an increasing interest in the emergent field of behavioural economics. This applies findings from research on errors and biases in social decision making (see Section 7.3) to understand how people make economic decisions (Kahneman, 2011). Such research has led an increasing number of people to question the validity of some of the assumptions underlying economic theory and to recognise the importance of understanding how people respond to challenging economic scenarios, such as a global economic collapse, a stock market crash or a crisis of confidence in banks and other financial institutions. Some commentators have gone so far as to argue that, since governing involves predicting
behaviour or getting people to change it, psychologists may have more to offer than economists.


Social psychology also has strong ties with sociology but, while social psychology is focused on the reciprocal interaction between individuals and their social context, sociology is concerned with the study of societies and the ways in which their institutions and other structural features are interconnected and impact on people’s lives. Although both social psychology and sociology are interested in groups, sociologists are interested in the effect of the group in general (i.e. at a macro level), while social psychologists are more interested in the effect of the group on the individual.

The connection identified earlier between social psychology and industrial-organisational psychology underpins the link between social psychology and management. Social psychological research on such issues as conflict and power, group dynamics, team working, organisational culture, gender and diversity and implementing change clearly has implications for management theory and practice (see Chapters 18 and 19).

3.3 Applications of social psychology: Scenario 1

3.3.1 Stress and its impact

In our first scenario we look at one example of how social psychology is interconnected with both health and organisational life. This concerns how we understand the impact of external events on our lives – especially at work – and our ability to adjust to or cope with them. This is the main focus of research on stress and life events and their impact. We examine how social psychology has helped us to understand the nature of stress – in life in general and, more specifically, in the workplace – and its individual and organisational costs. Social psychology can assist companies and individuals to find ways to minimise the occurrence and impact of stress.

3.3.2 Stress, life events and health outcomes

Stress is a very widely used concept, but the precise definition that people employ when discussing stress is often unclear. In very broad terms, it is a negative emotional experience which, like other emotions, comprises three predictable responses to a situation or event (the stressor): bodily arousal (with associated biochemical changes, such as increased heart rate, shallowness of breathing); cognitive interpretation or appraisal (including beliefs about the negative or threatening qualities of the stressor); and behavioural changes (including avoiding or attempting to change the situation).

Stop and read Gilovich et al. (2013) pp.562–73 for a discussion of how social psychology has been applied to understanding stress and health outcomes.

Rather than considering stress as a response only to negative events or situations, social psychological approaches to stress have suggested that it can arise in response to positive as well as negative circumstances. Holmes and Rahe (1967) have argued that stress arises from the degree to which people have to readjust their lives in response to any external event. Thus, stress comprises the negative feelings and beliefs that occur whenever people feel they cannot cope with demands from their environment. In the short term, acute stress produces emotional distress
and physiological strain, and if the stress continues (i.e. becomes chronic), it may make one more susceptible to future illness. This approach has led to the important general finding that major life events correlate with the onset of illness. Moreover, life events which require a greater number of changes or more significant changes (e.g. getting divorced or getting married, winning the lottery or incurring a major debt) are correlated with more significant episodes of illness. There is also evidence that the loss of family and friends or possessions associated with an extreme event, such as a flood, earthquake or tsunami, can generate post-traumatic stress and other mental illness symptoms (see, for example, Assanangkornchai, Tangboonngam and Edwards, 2004).


Activity 3.1

Obtain a copy of Holmes and Rahe's Social Readjustment Scale, for measuring the stress levels of life events (you should be able to find versions of this by searching on the internet). For a period of one week, keep a 'stress diary'. Each day, note:

a. daily hassles
b. chronic stressors
c. stressful life events (following Holmes and Rahe's listings).

Also note any episodes of ill health (minor and major) that you experience during and immediately after that month.

Then consider each of the following questions:

1. Which of the three types of stressor appear objectively the most stressful, in that they require major adjustments to your lifestyle?
2. Which of the three types of stressor do you find subjectively to be the most stressful?
3. What actions, if any, have you taken in response to these stressors?

Please note: Everyone experiences stress to varying degrees at different times in their lives. Indeed, stress can be energising and vital in providing us with the motivation to achieve our goals.

3.3.3 Coping with stress

An individual's ability to cope with stress will depend upon both their internal and external resources for and barriers to coping.

Internal factors include an individual's personality characteristics and the adequacy of their usual coping style (i.e. the way a person typically responds to stress). There are wide individual differences in the extent to which we perceive a situation as stressful – what you may see as exciting and challenging, someone else may see as overwhelming and anxiety provoking. One common distinction is between those people with Type A and Type B personality. This refers to two sets of personality characteristics which are differentially linked with susceptibility to heart disease. Type A people are workaholics, aggressive, competitive and impatient, while Type Bs are more easy going, placid and 'laid-back'. As you might expect, Type As are more susceptible to high blood pressure and heart disease. People vary in their coping strategies but essentially fall into two categories: those who tend to minimise or avoid thinking about health threats, and those who tend to confront threats by trying to find out more about them and understand how to deal with them. Minimising may be effective in the short-term but may exacerbate long-term stress, since it may be associated with increased physiological activation and poor health. Confronting may
deal more effectively with threats in the long-term, but at a short-term cost of greater anxiety. Pennebaker (1990) has conducted studies that suggest that we may benefit from trying to think (and talk) about stress and its causes. Trying to suppress negative thoughts can lead to an obsession with those very thoughts and can add to one’s stress (see Chapter 7 on social cognition).


External factors can include the social support a person can draw on (i.e. the perception that others are responsive to your needs) the time and money to cope, and any other stressors impinging on that person.


### 3.3.4 Sources of stress at work

For many people, work can be a major source of stress. One way of understanding stress, which is useful in the work context, is as a process by which we evaluate and respond to demands in our physical and social environments and to threatening or challenging events that occur in our lives. Stress will occur when the perceived demands placed upon individuals exceed the resources they perceive they have available to them to meet those demands (Hobfoll, 1989).


Stress can have negative effects on an individual’s sense of well-being, their behaviour and on their physical and mental health. Its impact on organisations can be extremely costly in terms of lost productivity, high levels of absenteeism and staff turnover, and litigation. Stress-related illnesses also have a major impact on the health costs of both organisations and countries. For example, a United Nations survey found that one in 10 workers experiences stress at work and that the estimated cost of job-related stress to employers in Europe and the USA is some $120 billion (Olson, 2000).

Stop and look at www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1225811/1.html for comment on the impact of job stress in Singapore. Stress is not restricted to the West.

Working within an organisation can expose people to a range of environmental stressors (e.g. noise, heat and poor workplace design) and to other sources of stress which are intrinsic to their job (e.g. shift work, long hours, risk and danger, new technology and work overload or underload). More interesting from the social psychological perspective is the stress that results from the individual’s role in the organisation, relationships at work, career development issues and organisational structure and climate. For example, stress frequently results from role ambiguity (i.e. lack of clarity about the scope, objectives and responsibilities of one’s job) and from role conflict (i.e. job demands which are in conflict with one another or which are seen as unreasonable).

Similarly, dealing with others – whether they be superiors, subordinates or colleagues - can be a major source of stress. Change, which can involve new working practices, the removal of familiar working partnerships and social relationships, or even the prospect of losing your job due to downsizing or closure, can also be a major source of stress.
Chapter 3: Interrelations and applications


The level of stress varies across occupations. A league table (based on a 10-point scale) devised for the UK suggested that the most stressful occupations are: miner (8.3), police officer (7.7), construction worker, journalist, pilot (civilian) and prison officer (each 7.5). According to this table, the least stressful jobs are: museum worker (2.8) and librarian (2.0). A psychologist was approximately halfway down the list (5.2) sandwiched between a bus driver (5.4) and working in publishing (5.0).

A study by Johnson et al. (2005) found that six occupations report worse than average scores on three stress-related variables (psychological well-being, physical health and job satisfaction): ambulance workers, teachers, social services, customer services/call centres, prison officers and police. Somewhat different lists emerge from the USA. For example, a study in 2012 identified the 10 most stressful jobs as: enlisted soldier, firefighter, airline pilot, military general, police officer, event coordinator, public relations executive, corporate executive, photojournalist and taxi driver.

Stop and look at: www.careercast.com/jobs-rated/10-most-stressful-jobs-2012 This article also lists the 10 least stressful jobs of 2012.

We suggest you review the two lists and the associated methodology and see if you agree with the ways in which the two lists were generated.


Although work potentially can be a source of stress with all its attendant consequences, a certain level of pressure can be motivating, energising and exciting and is an integral part of being alive. Moreover, work can also be a major contributor to our mental health and overall well-being. Work outside the home (i.e. paid employment) provides many people with a range of benefits, including feelings of competence, self-worth and achievement, independence and autonomy and a sense of being valued. What we do for a living, that is our work role, is also fundamental to our identity – who we are.

If work plays such a significant role in our lives, then conversely we might expect that not being in paid employment will be problematic – both for the individual concerned and for others. People who find themselves unemployed when they would prefer to be in work not only lose the income on which they probably depend, but also experience psychological and physical health problems owing to the lack of a time structure, social status and the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and use their skills.


Activity 3.2

Think about the job you hold or a job you have held in the past (this might be a full-time, part-time or temporary job) and answer the following questions:

1. Which of the following stressors/sources of stress do/did you experience?
   a. work overload
   b. work underload – under-utilisation of abilities/skills
   c. long hours
   d. unsocial hours/shift work
   e. lack of flexibility – work/home conflict
   f. responsibility for others
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3.3.5 Managing work-related stress

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the costs of stress at work, both to the individual and to the organisation and therefore of the need to reduce work-related stress. Strategies designed to minimise the occurrence and impact of stress in the workplace vary in their focus and essentially fall into two categories. One set of interventions focuses on the organisation and attempts to remove, or at least to reduce, significant stressors at work. For example, a company may improve the physical working conditions, by installing a new air-conditioning system, or may provide time management training to ensure staff use their time efficiently and effectively. Clearly, there are limits to this approach as, in many cases, organisations are unable – or, in some cases, unwilling – to remove the sources of stress from the working environment.

The majority of organisations therefore resort to another form of intervention – programmes that provide stress counselling and stress management training. These programmes are designed to help employees to deal with stress and to minimise its negative effects and a well-managed company will typically take this course of action. Such provision helps both the individuals and the organisations to which they belong. However, it can be argued that stress counselling and stress management training deal with the symptoms, not the cause and that more effort needs to be made to try to ensure that employees’ needs are recognised and their contribution valued, thereby reducing the likelihood that pressure in the workplace will be experienced as stress.


An individual’s ability to manage stress is also affected by their personal circumstances (see Section 3.3.3). So, as well as individuals seeking help
from their organisations through stress management programmes, they themselves can take action to combat stress by seeking support from others or by participating in relaxing and diverting activities, unconnected with work. A more drastic course of action may be to seek a new job with fewer sources of stress.

3.3.6 Benefits and challenges of applying social psychology to understand stress and its impact, especially in the workplace

Taking a social psychological approach to understanding stress provides clear benefits. First, it suggests important qualifications to the commonsense notion that stress is solely a response to either negative life changes or to major life events. Rather, the research suggests that positive events are also stressful and that daily hassles may also have an impact on health. Second, it highlights ways in which we might begin to combat the negative impacts of stress, in that research suggests that cognitive appraisal and coping strategies are vital in addressing stress, and that social support can play an important role in mitigating its impact. Encouraging people to develop appropriate coping strategies, or to reassess their appraisal of stressful situations, should therefore yield benefits in reducing people's stress. These benefits are ones that accrue to employees in the short-term, but which should have longer-term benefits for the organisation itself.

Perhaps the major challenge to applying social psychological principles to the workplace relates to the nature of the workplace. Economic considerations are always paramount, so that any proposed application of theory must be seen by the organisation or company to yield economic benefits, and usually in the short term. Moreover, given that a full understanding of stress may require adopting the perspective of the people affected by stress, this suggests that in order to address stress in the workplace, social psychologists need to understand not only the perspective of management, but also the perspective of the workforce.

3.4 Applications of social psychology: Scenario 2

3.4.1 Helping others: self-interest or selflessness?

Our second scenario focuses on pro-social or helping behaviour. Why do people choose to help others and what circumstances encourage such behaviour? What are the barriers to intervention? Who is likely to help and who is likely to receive help? Answers to these questions involve a number of important social psychological concepts – such as norms, conformity and empathy – and raise further, fundamental, questions about human motivation and an individual’s responsibilities to others. Knowledge of pro-social behaviour and its associated costs and rewards can help us to understand who is likely to help and when. It can also help us to appreciate the social dynamics of emergencies and the phenomena of non-intervention and bystander apathy.

3.4.2 What is pro-social behaviour?

Although the terms pro-social behaviour, helping behaviour and altruism are often used interchangeably, there are some subtle differences in meaning. Pro-social behaviour refers to behaviour that is valued positively by society. A common example of pro-social behaviour is helping behaviour – acts that intentionally help others, such as aiding a stranger in need or providing emotional or practical support to a friend. Altruism is a particular kind of helping behaviour in which the actions performed
are motivated solely by the desire to benefit the recipient and without any expectation of personal gain.

Helping behaviour became a concern of social psychologists following the murder of a young woman, Kitty Genovese, in New York City in 1964. Despite a number of neighbours hearing her screams for help and turning on their lights, nobody called the police until some considerable time had elapsed and the victim of the attack was dead. Obvious questions are whether the response is affected by the presence of others and whether the apparent indifference or apathy and failure to intervene are unusual or are typical in such circumstances.

★ Stop and look at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSsPibup0ac for an example of the failure to help.

Research by Darley and Latane (1968) suggested that bystanders will intervene only if they notice an incident, interpret it as an emergency, assume responsibility for taking action, know the appropriate action to take and decide to take action. At each stage, the presence of other people can deter an individual from making a decision that will lead to them helping. People in groups are less likely than a solitary individual to notice an unusual situation or to define it as an emergency. Moreover, when people believe that others are aware of someone's distress – as was the case in the Kitty Genovese murder – responsibility is distributed or diffused across the group and any single individual is less likely to help than when they believe they bear sole responsibility for taking action.

This bystander effect – the fact that any particular bystander is less likely to give help with other bystanders present – has been shown to emerge in a range of situations and appears to involve two separate processes: pluralistic ignorance and diffusion of responsibility. Pluralistic ignorance is the state of affairs that exists when bystanders assume nothing is wrong because other people present seem to see nothing amiss. Its occurrence highlights the social and shared nature of much of our behaviour – we rely on the actions of others to decide what is appropriate behaviour in a particular setting. Diffusion of responsibility refers to decrease in the degree of responsibility felt by each person in association with the number of people present. When people believe responsibility to act is shared with others (i.e. diffused), then they feel less personal responsibility to act.


Activity 3.3

1. Think of two situations where you have helped a person who looked as if they needed help or where you have seen someone else help a person in need of assistance.

2. Now think of two situations where you have not helped a person who looked as if they needed help or where you have seen someone else failing to help a person in need of assistance.

3. Analyse the four situations in terms of what the problem appeared to be, whether the incidents were noticed and interpreted as an emergency, and the action taken by you (or the person you observed). How many other people were present? What role, if any, do you think the bystander effect played in determining your response or that of others in the four scenarios?
3.4.3 Why do we help others?

One reason for helping others is altruism – an unselfish regard for others’ welfare. Under certain circumstances, human beings do appear to behave in an altruistic manner – for example, donating blood or pulling an injured person from a derailed train or providing support for someone with a prolonged terminal illness can all be seen as purely altruistic acts. People display altruism in different ways and a common distinction is between heroic altruism, which is short-term, requires a visible, often physical action to help individual strangers, and nurturant altruism, which requires a longer-term commitment, is private rather than public and often involves helping family or friends by listening or otherwise providing support. Altruism may be linked to empathy – feeling pain when you see someone in distress and relief when suffering is alleviated – which can also motivate helping. Evolutionary psychology proposes that some forms of altruism – such as caring for and protecting our children – promotes survival and thereby helps to perpetuate our genes. This evolutionary perspective on altruism is supported, for example, both by evidence that children whose mother has died are most likely to be cared for by those who share the children’s genes – such as grandmothers, aunts and other relatives – and by the fact that, when faced by danger, people seek to save those who bear the closest relationship to them.

However, altruism may not be the only explanation of helping behaviour. Another reason is self-interest. According to social exchange theory, we seek to maximise the rewards of any interaction and to minimise its costs (see Section 16.3.2). So, if we are trying to decide whether or not to become a blood donor, we may weigh up the costs of so doing (discomfort, time, anxiety) against the associated benefits (approval from others, feeling worthy, reduced guilt). If the perceived rewards of helping exceed the anticipated costs, you are likely to help by giving blood. Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner and Clark III (1981) apply this cost–benefit approach to understand bystander behaviour in emergency situations. According to the bystander-calculus model, the bystander becomes physiologically aroused by the sight of someone in distress, labels this arousal as emotion and then calculates the perceived costs and benefits of providing help, compared with those associated with not helping.

Social expectations also influence helping behaviour. Through the process of socialisation, we adopt the reciprocity norm whereby we are expected to help, not harm, those who have helped us. We also learn the social responsibility norm – that we should help people who need our help, even if the costs outweigh the benefits. Although many of the popular explanations for pro-social behaviour suggest we are guided by self-interest, this pessimistic view may reflect, at least in part, the emphasis on individualism and self-centred motives in Western societies. However, the more optimistic alternative that true altruism exists remains a real possibility and the motives for helping others continue to be a matter of considerable interest and debate.

Research into helping behaviour suggests that we are most likely to help someone when:

- the victim appears to need and deserve help
- the victim is similar to us in some way
- the emergency situation is in a small town or rural area
- we have just observed someone else being helpful
- we are not in a hurry
• we are not preoccupied with our own concerns
• we are feeling guilty
• we are in a good mood and are feeling happy.

However, helping behaviour does appear to vary across different cultures and the pattern of such behaviour seems to be associated with socialisation practices. Looking at helping behaviour from a cultural perspective highlights the need both to recognise how the meaning of help is dependent upon the cultural context and to see helping behaviour as part of the wider moral system that links individuals in social relationships. Culture establishes the implicit and explicit rules that guide both those who seek help and those who receive it.


Activity 3.4
Consider each of the situations below.
• You see a broken-down car by the side of a busy road with the female driver crying.
• You are asked to have your bone marrow typed to see if you are a match for a close relative needing a bone marrow transplant.
• You see an elderly gentleman trip over on the other side of the street - there is nobody in the street but you.
• You see a young boy, aged about four years, wandering in a shopping centre apparently without any adult looking after him.

For each one, assess:
a. Would you help?
b. If yes, why?
c. If no, why not?

To what extent do the theoretical explanations of helping behaviour account for your decision?

3.5 Overview
Social psychology interacts with a variety of subject areas, both within and outside psychology. Social psychologists and their colleagues in these other disciplines address many of the same questions, and dissemination of their findings will aid our mutual understanding of many real-world issues. We have looked at two such issues: stress and its impact, especially in the workplace, and helping behaviour.

In the first scenario, we considered ideas about the origins and effects of stress and factors which affect the ability to cope with stress. As well as examining stress in everyday life, we identified sources of stress in the workplace and their impact, both on individuals and on organisations. We also noted the importance of work as a source of satisfaction and saw how our sense of well-being is inextricably linked with our experience of work.

In the second scenario, we demonstrated how helping behaviour is influenced by a multiplicity of factors and considered some of the explanations of why we help others. Some models focus on the situation - in particular the presence of other potential helpers - which is seen as leading to diffusion of responsibility - while others look at the costs and benefits associated with helping or not helping. Some people argue that helping is motivated by altruism - the desire to benefit others with no expectation of personal gain or reward.
Analysis of these two applications of social psychology highlights the importance of the interplay between theoretical concepts and models and research findings in understanding behaviour that is part of our daily repertoire.

### 3.6 Key terms

These key terms will be useful as index entries or search terms if you choose to consult titles suggested as Further reading or other relevant texts or online sources. After completing the chapter and relevant reading, we suggest you try to outline the essential features of each of the key terms listed below in order to check that you have understood the material. If you are unclear about any of the key terms listed, we suggest you go over the material again.

- **Social neuroscience**
- **Behavioural economics**
- **Stress**
- **Life events**
- **Locus of control**
- **Work stress**
- **Quality of life**
- **Pro-social behaviour**
- **Helping behaviour**
- **Altruism**
3.7 Reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• describe how social psychology is related to other subject areas, within and outside psychology

• discuss how theories, concepts and findings from social psychology can be used to help understand real-world issues, specifically:
  • stress and its impact
  • why, and under what conditions, people help others

• identify some of the challenges and benefits of applying social psychology to practical problems.

3.8 Test your knowledge and understanding

1. What is social neuroscience and why is it important?
2. What are some of the major sources of stress at work?
3. How might an organisation seek to minimise stress and its impact?
4. What is pro-social behaviour?
Chapter 4: Research in social psychology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we provide an introduction to the range of data-collection methods and research techniques used in social psychology and in organisational and management settings. We also explore the methodological and ethical issues commonly faced by social psychologists. We illustrate these issues with examples from the fields of management and organisational psychology.

4.1.1 Aims

The aims of this chapter are to:

• explain the key steps involved in the investigation of social psychological phenomena
• describe and differentiate between the key research methods used in social psychology: experimental studies, field experiments, quasi-experiments and non-experimental studies
• identify the main criteria by which research is assessed
• introduce you to the main ethical issues in social psychological research.

4.1.2 Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

• outline the data collection methods and research techniques available to social psychologists
• identify the key features, advantages and disadvantages of the various research methods
• discuss problems commonly encountered in conducting research
• describe the ethical issues facing social psychologists and evaluate their implications for psychological research.

4.1.3 Essential reading


4.1.4 Further reading

4.1.5 References cited

American Psychological Association Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct (2010). Available at: www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx


4.1.6 Synopsis

This chapter examines the range of research methods that social psychologists use to investigate social thought and behaviour. The choice of research method will depend on the research questions being asked and the advantages and disadvantages of each method. The chapter introduces concepts such as independent and dependent variables, experimental control, quantitative and qualitative data, validity and realism and discusses the trade-offs that exist among them. We locate these concepts within the wider context of both the nature of the research process and the role played by theory in research. Another focus is the range of ethical issues that social psychologists face and the ethical principles guiding their research.
4.2 Investigating social psychological phenomena

Social psychologists use a variety of research methods, ranging from rigorously-controlled experiments, which aim to test theoretical predictions, to open-ended interviews or focus groups, which aim to describe the beliefs of a given group of people about an issue. All such research faces the key problem of how to relate research findings to the ‘real-world’ phenomena of interest.

Stop and read Hogg and Vaughan (2011) pp.8–17 for an overview of methodological issues in social psychological research.

The kinds of research questions that are typically investigated in social psychology can be divided according to their aims:

- Descriptive questions – characterising the nature of a phenomenon, or mapping its occurrence in a location or situation. These are ‘what’ questions.
  For example, we might investigate the implementation of a new software among employees of an organisation and its impact on their productivity; we might hold focus groups where employees can express their views and exchange opinions with people from different departments; or we might engage in participant observation of employees using this new software, developing an understanding of those settings where the new software implementation is having most impact.

- Correlational questions – discovering correlations (associations) that indicate when a phenomenon usually occurs, or with which people. These are ‘when’ or ‘how’ questions. The results extend the answers provided by descriptive questions by allowing prediction of when, where or with whom a phenomenon occurs.
  For example, we might ask how common different attitudes towards this new software are, and whether those attitudes are correlated with other factors such as age, education and seniority in the organisation.

- Causal questions – finding out which conditions cause the phenomenon or testing whether a causal prediction is supported. These are ‘why’ questions. The results extend the answers provided by correlational questions by allowing understanding of which aspects of the correlation cause each other.
  For example, we might investigate the impact on productivity of the implementation of this new software. Specifically, we could assess which features of the new software result in improved productivity and which do not, by comparing the results of implementing software that possess those features with the results of implementing software that do not possess them. We could thus answer the question of why the software has such an impact on productivity.

It is important to recognise that correlation is not the same as causation. It is not possible to infer causation from correlation. Correlation means that two things (e.g. height and weight) are associated with each other, but such an association can occur for a variety of reasons. The two things may vary together by chance or because they are both related to a third attribute (e.g. both height and weight are related to age), rather than because there is any direct or causal relation. A causal relation means that one thing has a direct effect on another (e.g. the amount of food you eat causes an increase in weight). Let us take another example. There appears to be an association between increased sales of ice cream and an increased rate of deaths by drowning, but it would be unwise to conclude that ice
cream consumption causes drowning. It is more likely that increased drowning occurs in summer months when more people engage in water sports and when, incidentally, more ice cream is usually consumed.

» Stop and read Myers (2013) pp.18–22 for a discussion of correlation and causation.

In the software example above, the degree to which the new software is operated using visual symbols may correlate with increased productivity but the new software might itself generate an improved sense of task control, which then improves productivity. So, improved productivity is caused by the improved sense of control and not directly by the visual nature of the new software.

Different research methods are more successful in answering different question types. Descriptive questions are best answered by non-experimental methods or those producing ‘qualitative’ data. Correlational questions are best addressed by survey methods, which produce ‘quantitative’ data. Causal questions are best answered using experimental methods which also produce quantitative data. Overall, there is no single best way of carrying out research in social psychology. Different methods are appropriate for different kinds of research, each having its advantages and disadvantages. In order to exploit the advantages and minimise the disadvantages, the best research often tries to use more than one method and to ‘triangulate’ the results (see Flick, 1992). A major contrast is between experimental and non-experimental studies.

4.3 Experimental studies

Social psychological research often investigates causal explanations for aspects of social behaviour or thought. The procedure involves creating a hypothesis, which is an idea about what causes a given behaviour, stated in a form that can be tested. A hypothesis is commonly expressed as ‘if A then B’: for example, if the number of people in a group increases, then the less hard each will work (social loafing). To test this hypothesis or prediction, it is necessary to vary group size and assess its impact (if any) on the degree of social loafing. In such studies, the group size is termed the ‘independent variable’ and degree of social loafing, the ‘dependent variable’.

» Stop and read Myers (2013) pp.16–18, which summarises the key issues in forming and testing hypotheses in social psychology.

Many experiments are conducted in a laboratory, which offers a controlled environment in which to manipulate the independent variable and observe its effect on the dependent variable. It also offers the capacity for random assignment of participants to treatment groups, both of which are key features of the experimental approach. Field experiments (i.e. those conducted in the real world), while still permitting manipulation of the independent variable, offer less control than laboratory experiments. Quasi-experiments are also conducted in the real world, but involve the use of naturally occurring groups and hence preclude random assignment.

4.3.1 Laboratory experiments

In a laboratory experiment, the researcher varies one characteristic of the environment to assess its effect on the phenomenon being studied. This is a powerful research tool. If the experimenter can vary or manipulate the environment in this way and control all extraneous factors (i.e. hold constant all factors that might impact on the phenomenon, so that the only thing that could cause the phenomenon to change is the aspect of the environment that is manipulated), they can be confident that any observed
changes in the phenomenon are due to the manipulation of the critical aspects of the environment. The experimenter is then able to propose an explanation for the phenomenon of interest, by showing what causes it to change.

A major first step in an experimental study is to ‘operationalise’ the phenomenon under investigation and the critical aspects of the environment that are thought to have an impact on it. Operationalising the phenomenon involves translating it into something that can be measured in the study (the ‘dependent variable’: see Section 4.3.3). In this way, the researcher can measure any changes to the dependent variable that depend on manipulations of the environment. Operationalising the critical aspect of the environment involves translating it into something that can be manipulated in the study (the ‘independent variable’: see Section 4.3.2). Hence, the researcher can vary whether that critical aspect is present in the experiment, or the degree to which it is present. For example, a researcher might be interested in the phenomenon of prejudice and the hypothesis that it would be reduced by contact between the holder of a prejudiced belief and a person against whom they are prejudiced. This requires a definition of prejudice that can be measured, so that its level before and after contact can be compared, and a definition of contact that can be manipulated, so that its presence or absence (or degree of presence) can be varied to determine if the hypothesis is correct.

Hence, operational definitions take theoretical characterisations of social psychological phenomena and translate them into useable empirical indicators. The results of the experiment are then interpreted by translating them back into our understanding of the phenomenon of interest. That is, the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable observed in the laboratory is assumed to reflect the relationship between the critical aspects of the environment and the phenomenon in the real world. Social psychologists must, however, be cautious in this back-translation. Operationalisation usually involves a simplified and controlled version of reality, and this must always be borne in mind when interpreting social psychological findings. So it is always a matter of translating findings – with caution and appropriate qualifications – to fit the world, rather than extrapolating them wholesale and assuming they are universally valid.

### 4.3.2 Independent variable

The first concern in an experiment is the independent variable which must be unambiguous and totally within the control of the experimenter. For example, to test a hypothesis that people in a group work less hard than those working alone, a phenomenon known as ‘social loafing’, we may have a number of people working together, perhaps eight, and compare their average performance with the average performance of eight people working separately. Here, the independent variable would be whether or not the people being experimented on – the participants – worked in a group or worked alone.

▶️ **Stop and read** Myers (2013) pp.23–28 for an outline of experimentation in social psychology.

To ensure that this study is a valid experiment it would be necessary to control all other factors – the extraneous variables – so that the only difference between the situations in which the two sets of participants work is the independent variable of group versus non-group. The set of participants working in the group is termed the ‘experimental group’ and those working alone, the comparison set, is known as the ‘control group’. 

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Obviously, such factors as the difficulty of the tasks facing the participants in the experimental and control conditions must be the same, and the experimenter’s instructions must be equivalent. If one group is told to work as hard as possible so must the other group. This appears elementary, but it is necessary to be very careful in designing an experiment as these things can easily be overlooked. The conditions under which the two groups work, such as the level of light, temperature and ambient sound, must all be equal.

The control of variables is one aspect of conducting valid experiments. However, in the example above, although we may have controlled the conditions under which the groups work, we have not controlled all the personal characteristics of the two groups. Some properties of participants can be specified – for example, age range, gender, educational level. However, regardless of the criteria we use in selecting participants, variations in all sorts of known and unknown attributes would remain. Participants could vary in intelligence, perseverance, interest in the experimental task, ability to work with other people and in many other factors which might affect their performance. None of these (especially the unknown ones) can be controlled. The only way to reduce the chance of their interfering with the experimental results is to assign participants randomly to the control and experimental groups. In that way the probability of getting lazy or diligent participants will be equal for the two groups. Random assignment ensures that there is no systematic bias in selection of participants for the two groups and so neutralises the impact of individual differences.

In fact, when the hypothesis above was tested (e.g. Karau and Williams, 1993, and Latané, Williams and Harkins, 1979) it was found that social loafing often does occur (i.e. people in a group do work less hard than those working alone), and that this is caused partly by a motivation loss as numbers increase and partly by a coordination loss as group members interfere with each other’s efforts (see Chapter 10).

4.3.3 Dependent variable

Experiments aim to see whether, and by how much, the dependent variable changes with variations in the independent variable. This requires a dependent variable that can be clearly measured.

Going back to our previous example, in investigating social loafing, several measures of performance have been used. In some experiments, participants had to pull as hard as they could on a rope arranged so that the total force exerted could be measured; or they had to shout or clap as loudly as they could, the total noise then being measured. In these experiments, it was necessary to ensure that the total group effort was measured in the same way on each trial so that the average output per member of the group, which was the dependent variable, would be measured in the same way each time. This may seem commonsense but the procedure of measuring the dependent variable must be specified in advance, so that decisions about a given score are not made after the data are collected since this could lead to inadvertant bias in interpreting that score.

4.3.4 Field experiments

Carrying out research in the laboratory provides a high degree of control over the variables, but can lead to research that is relatively low in mundane realism (i.e. there is little match with the real world) so that participants may not behave in ways that reflect their everyday behaviour
(see the discussion of validity and realism in Section 4.5.1). By contrast, field experiments take place outside of the laboratory in everyday settings. Participants may not be aware that they are participating in a field experiment, and so may act more ‘naturally’. As in laboratory experiments, the independent variable is manipulated. For example, in a study of consumer behaviour, North and Hargreaves (1997) found that the music played in a US supermarket (independent variable) influenced purchase of wine (dependent variable): when French music was played, French wine outsold German, and vice versa. However, there is less prospect in field experiments of controlling potentially confounding variables that may arise from simply being in an ordinary setting (e.g. German wine is usually white wine, and this may be more attractive in warmer weather).

**Activity 4.1**

Design an experiment to test the hypothesis that it is more effective to show a 30-second TV advertisement four times during a TV programme than a one-minute advertisement twice.

1. What is the independent variable?
2. What is the dependent variable? How will it be measured? What would you expect to find?
3. Are there any other variables that you think might confound the impact of the independent variable? Can they be controlled for? How?
4. How would participants be chosen?
5. How would they be assigned to the experimental groups?

### 4.3.5 Quasi-experiments

Field experiments involve manipulating an independent variable in the real world, resulting in relatively little control over possible confounding variables. By contrast, quasi-experiments involve no manipulation of the independent variable at all, but may involve attempts at controlling possibly confounding variables. Quasi-experiments can be used when the independent variable cannot be manipulated for practical reasons (such as race or gender), or for ethical reasons. In such cases, researchers employ already existing groupings to examine the pattern of relationships between variables as they already exist in the world – the basis for dividing the different groups reflects the hypothesised causal variable.

Suppose we were interested in the impact of cigarette smoking on alcohol consumption. A true experimental design would involve allocating participants at random to ‘smoking’ (experimental) and ‘non-smoking’ (control) groups and observing how much alcohol they consumed over a given time period. For both practical and ethical reasons, this is not feasible. A quasi-experimental study might, instead, compare the alcohol consumption of a group of people who already smoke with a group who do not. This could not control all possible confounding variables (e.g. pre-existing differences in attitudes towards alcohol and its effects), but by selecting members of the two groups with care, other possible confounding variables can be matched across the groups (e.g. gender, age).

### 4.4 Non-experimental studies

In Section 4.3 we outlined the experimental approach and in 4.3.1 we highlighted the defining attributes of laboratory experiments. In Sections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5 we examined field experiments and quasi-experiments,
which apply to situations where a true experiment is not possible. While experiments are used to examine causal questions, there are situations where an experiment is not appropriate to the research question to be investigated. Descriptive and correlational questions require non-experimental techniques, and this section outlines their key features.

### 4.4.1 Questionnaire surveys

Surveys often have descriptive purposes (for example, to find out what a group of people believe about an issue), but they can also be used to explore correlations between characteristics of respondents and their responses.


A survey is a set of standard questions asked of a sample of people. The two main design tasks are therefore to select the questions and to choose the sample of people to whom the questions are to be directed. Much detailed care has to go into choosing the exact form of the questions to be asked. Biased questions should be avoided; for example, in investigating attitudes towards the credit crunch, one would probably not ask, ‘Why were bankers to blame for the credit crunch?’ Researchers must also decide whether questions should be open-ended, allowing respondents to choose their own response, or fixed-response, where the respondent chooses one of a fixed set of answers. Other issues to be considered include question ordering, questionnaire length and method of administering the survey.

*Stop and read* Breakwell et al. (2012) Chapter 6 for a detailed presentation on the design and use of questionnaire surveys.

After devising the questionnaire, the next step is to select the respondents. Normally, not all the people in whose responses one is interested (i.e. the population) will be surveyed, because there are usually too many of them. The task is therefore to select an appropriate sample from the population of interest with the aim of ensuring that the sample is representative of the population. One way of achieving this goal is to use a simple random sample, which means that every member of the population whose responses one wants to measure has an equal chance of being selected for the sample. However, with large and geographically diffuse populations, this sampling technique is impractical and so researchers often use other sampling designs (e.g. stratification and quota sampling). The size of the sample is also important: broadly, the larger the sample the better the chance of getting a representative response, but the cost will go up with the size of the sample. Ensuring appropriate sampling is not always easy, but it is a major part of establishing external validity or generalisability of the survey results. Recent years have seen increased use of online or internet responses for surveys; this has the advantage that large numbers can often be recruited with little expense, but the disadvantage of a lack of control over sampling – that is, over who actually completes the questionnaire.


### Activity 4.2

Think of a controversial topic – for instance, the use of child labour in the manufacturing of garments. Try designing a short questionnaire that could be used to assess people’s opinions on this topic.

1. Would you use open-ended or closed questions? If you choose closed questions, what kinds of answers will you permit (e.g. binary Yes/No versus a scale from Strongly agree through Neither agree nor disagree to Strongly disagree)? Why?

2. How will you ensure that your questions do not bias the responses of participants?
4.4.2 Interviews and focus groups

As we have seen previously, experiments and questionnaires generate quantitative data to answer research questions. In experiments, the causal impact of the independent variable is assessed by the quantitative change it produces in the dependent variable. In surveys, correlations between two variables are assessed in terms of the increase or decrease in the quantity of one in relation to the increase or decrease in the other.

In using such methods, the researcher needs a clear idea, in advance, of the range of responses participants might make. For example, in an experimental study the experimenter needs to be able to both identify the independent and dependent variables and specify the hypothesis; in closed survey questions, the researcher needs to set the possible attitudes that might be expressed. However, there are research topics in which the researcher does not have such detailed prior knowledge, or in which using highly structured techniques might lead to a distorted picture of the phenomenon. The first case might include social responses to rapidly changing circumstances or technologies; for example, assessing people's responses to nanotechnology first of all requires understanding what people think such technologies are, how they think they might be used, and so on. Given the very wide ramifications, a precise set of questions framed in advance is in danger of missing out significant information. The second case might include rather personal or sensitive topics. For example, the spread of HIV/AIDS has enormous consequences for the relevant populations, but many of the associated issues – sexual practices, gender roles, personal morality and religion – are too sensitive or personal to incorporate into a questionnaire. The use of predetermined categories of response for very subtle and context-sensitive issues may lead people to respond in ways that they think would be socially desirable.

To build up a rich descriptive picture of such phenomena, researchers have in recent years turned increasingly to techniques that generate qualitative data in order to answer descriptive questions in detail (see Howitt, 2010, Chapters 3 and 4). There are two principal techniques for generating such data. Semi-structured interviews typically involve the interviewer designing a topic guide, incorporating quite general questions or issues, which are used to encourage a flow of information in which the interviewee talks freely about the issues, can introduce any information they deem relevant, and in their own terms. Focus groups usually involve between four and eight participants who are encouraged by a facilitator to discuss an issue openly and, again, without restrictions on the kinds of connections that they make. Such qualitative techniques are often allied to more sociological forms of social psychology (see Chapter 2).

4.4.3 Observational studies

Social psychologists are often interested in assessing people's behaviour in ordinary, everyday settings, and for this, techniques of observation may be used (see Howitt, 2010, Chapter 5). For example, in understanding workplace communications, one might make observations of interaction around a water-cooler or other drinks location, or in the staff restaurant (see Parker, 2003 for an example of a four-year long participant observation study of boardroom deliberations).

One form of observation – participant observation – involves the researcher becoming a member of the group of participants whose...
behaviour is being studied, with the hope that the participants’ normal
behaviours are not disrupted by the researcher’s presence. Other
observational methods make a clear differentiation between the researcher
and participants. While often very illuminating, there are important
questions faced by observational techniques. One is that it can be very
difficult to separate observations of the participants’ behaviour from
the researcher’s interpretations of these observations. Another is that
observational techniques raise ethical issues regarding privacy and
confidentiality, especially when the participants are not aware of being
observed (see Vinten, 1994 for a fuller discussion).

4.4.4 Case studies
A non-experimental research method that is widely used in studies of
organisations and management is the single case study. Unlike experiments
and surveys, case studies do not aim to generalise from the sample studied
to a wider population. Rather, case studies aim to investigate a single case
in as much depth as possible. As a consequence, case studies tend to employ
multiple methods of research so as to generate a comprehensive picture
of the case. The range of data sources used in carrying out a case study of
an organisation might include interviews and focus groups, documents,
archives or websites of the organisation, and observation of the everyday
behaviour of employees or members of the organisation (see Islam et al.,
2012 for an example of a case study in an organisational setting).

For example, if one were interested in the internal communications
strategies of an organisation, analysing documents, archives or websites
may offer a picture of its formal policies and procedures. This might
involve characterising the main themes or ideas that are presented in
those public sources. The experience of employees and the informal
communications styles might then be assessed by using focus groups or
interviews. The researcher might obtain further detail about everyday
communications practices by observational methods.

Case studies also differ from experiments and surveys in that the research
questions investigated may alter as the study of the case proceeds. For
example, in studying organisational communications, it might be found
that the organisation does not encourage discussion of work–life balance,
and this may lead the researcher to then seek further information about a
new research question of whether this has an impact on productivity.

4.4.5 Media and other data sources
In addition to suggesting that researchers employ qualitative techniques
in collecting data about peoples’ behaviour and beliefs, sociological
approaches to social psychology have also encouraged the collection of
data about certain aspects of society itself.

For example, social psychologists may want to analyse the symbols
circulating in society or culture, such as the contents of the mass media
or, increasingly, of social media such as Facebook and Twitter (see Bauer
and Gaskell, 2000, Chapter 8). Quantitative media analysis may involve
content analysis (e.g. the frequency of occurrence of key words or phrases
in a sample of Facebook posts), or thematic analysis (e.g. the frequency
of specific themes or ideas in a sample of newspapers). This provides an
understanding of the prevalence of certain kinds of ideas in the media; for
example, gender biases in advertising. Qualitative approaches to analysing
media contents may involve discourse analysis, which relates the specific
contents of the media to power differentials in society (see Hogg and
4.5 Quality indicators in research

By now, it should be evident that carrying out high-quality research is a complex matter; each method comes with its own procedures that should be followed, and each has its strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, social psychologists have developed different tools that enable them to assess and agree on the quality of the research produced in a specific project.

4.5.1 Quality indicators in quantitative research

Social psychologists have paid a great deal of attention to assessing the quality of quantitative research data produced by experiments and questionnaire surveys.

Validity and realism

A general question for research concerns the degree to which the results of a study can safely be generalised outside the original study, such as to other populations, times, places, tasks and measurement instruments. This is termed ‘external validity’.

Stop and read Sanderson (2010), pp.46–52 for a thorough discussion of validity and realism issues.

Achieving external validity can be complex. One way of doing this is by ensuring that the study has high mundane realism – that is, the setting of the study and the way in which its variables are related should match the real-world situation which its results are intended to reflect. However, a study that lacks mundane realism might still achieve external validity if it is high in ‘experimental realism’, that is, if participants take the study seriously and become involved in the experimental procedure. In such a case, the psychological processes the participant uses in the study will reflect those they would use in the relevant real-world situation. Milgram’s classic study on obedience to authority (1974) provides a good example of such a possibility.

In the context of surveys, external validity has been assessed using two concepts: face validity and construct validity. Face validity concerns the apparent appropriateness of questions to address what they are intended to address, at a subjective level. That is, do the questions in the survey seem, on the surface, to reflect the issue of interest? Face validity is independent of construct validity, which concerns whether the questions accurately reflect the social psychological model of the phenomena they are intended to address.

Returning to experimental studies, an equally important concept is internal validity, which concerns the extent to which the manipulation of the independent variable has in fact caused the observed variations in the dependent variable. Research in social psychology faces a dilemma in that there is a trade-off between having enough control over the situation to ensure that no extraneous variables influence the results, and making sure that the results can be generalised to everyday life. Generally, the greater the degree of control of variables, the less likely the experimental situation is to be representative of the real world. This problem exists for all researchers concerned with applied research, and a partial solution is to carry out both experimental and field studies. If the combined methods converge on the same results, then one can be more confident that internal and external validity have been achieved.
Moreover, high experimental realism (a high commitment of participants to the study) may undermine external and internal validity. This is because all studies in which participants are aware that they are being studied are social situations and, as such, are susceptible to all of the social psychological issues that are the focus of this subject guide. For example, people in experiments are sensitive to ‘demand characteristics’ (Orne, 1962): any features of a study or the situation which participants use to try to work out what is expected of them, and lead them to behave in a way that does not reflect their behaviour outside of that study. These features in a sense ‘demand’ a certain response, so that people try to behave in a manner which confirms what they think to be the experimental hypothesis.

In addition, the experimenter may inadvertently communicate what they hope to get in terms of results to the participants and thereby change the way the participants behave (Rosenthal, 1976). This ‘experimenter effect’ can mean that any observed differences (e.g. between an experimental and control group) may arise from the experimenter inadvertently treating those groups differently (perhaps in matters as apparently trivial as tone of voice or other non-verbal gestures).

One solution to these problems is to use a double-blind procedure, in which neither the participant nor the experimenter knows whether the participant is a member of the control group or the experimental group. In the context of surveys and qualitative data, anyone involved in analysing the data would be unaware of the treatment group to which each participant belonged.

Reliability and replication

In the spirit of the scientific method discussed in Chapter 2, it is important that results be replicable. Replication, which applies to experimental methods, involves repeating the same research design, with the same kind of participants giving their responses under the same kinds of conditions. Provided the original findings were obtained through the manipulation of the independent variable and not the result of extraneous variables, such a replication should yield the same pattern of results. Additionally, conceptual or systematic replications - where the same overall design is employed, but one or more key aspects are altered, are also important. Here, the aim is to see how far the original findings can be generalised, for example, to a different population of participants, or to a different situation beyond those used in the first experiment. In this way, each new study adds information to the last.

A similar role to replication in experiments is played in surveys by the concept of reliability. This is the requirement that questions or scales measure what they claim to be measuring in a consistent manner. This suggests that a reliable questionnaire should give similar results for a set of participants tested at different times under the same set of circumstances.

The concepts of reliability and validity are distinct yet related. High reliability does not guarantee validity; that is, a study could reliably measure something that is irrelevant to the variable of interest. However, a study cannot achieve validity without reliability. Ensuring that a variable measures the phenomenon of interest does not just depend on an appropriate operationalisation of that phenomenon, that is, on making sure that it has been adequately ‘translated’. It also depends on its being accurately measured and, as explained above, reliability is an indicator of accuracy.
A particularly rigorous way of assessing the reliability and validity of a pattern of experimental or survey results is to conduct a meta-analysis. A meta-analysis uses statistical techniques to combine the results of several different studies that have a common hypothesis or quantitative research question. Whereas individual studies quantify the data from a number of participants, a meta-analysis quantifies the data from a number of studies with a single research question. Meta-analysis thereby allows an assessment of the extent to which those studies arrived at the same or similar results. For example, Blume and colleagues (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 89 empirical studies in order to examine the influence of different factors on the transfer of training in various contexts and with various tasks.

4.5.2 Quality indicators in qualitative research

The questions of validity and reliability apply somewhat differently to methods that generate qualitative data. Since interviews, focus groups and observation make no attempt to control the details of each exchange, to limit how discussions develop, or to direct the observations obtained, these data cannot really be quantified. Instead, researchers often attempt to identify specific meanings that are implicit in the comments made by participants or in the behaviours they exhibit. As a result, qualitative techniques have the advantage over other techniques that they offer very rich descriptions of a specific phenomenon, where the results more closely resemble the participants' perspective rather than the one of the researcher. However, they have the disadvantage that the findings are restricted to the specific person, time and place of collection, and cannot be generalised to other people, times or places. This means that, while many such methods guarantee a high degree of mundane realism (e.g. observational techniques directly observe the circumstances that are of interest), it may not be appropriate to consider their validity and reliability along the lines of quantitative research. If the goal is to understand the thoughts of a specific group of people in a particular location, then the issue of external validity, for example, does not really apply.

Given these considerations, proponents of qualitative research methods have recently begun to develop a set of appropriate criteria that will ensure their quality. Some are relatively straightforward, such as the use of inter-coder agreement to indicate reliability. In this instance, one researcher devises a coding frame for interpreting, for example, the statements made by participants in an interview – isolating its main themes and their interconnections; they then code the dataset using this coding frame. A second coder then codes a sample of the dataset. The reliability of the over-all coding is then assessed by the degree of agreement between the first and second coder. Other criteria are somewhat more complex, such as the use of surprise to indicate validity. Social research often has a ‘surprise value’, in terms of a theoretical contribution to a body of literature, or in terms of its disagreement with commonsense. While intuitively plausible as an indicator of the utility of research, such criteria are harder to specify. Howitt (2010, Chapter 14) summarises some of the main considerations that have been discussed, and Gaskell and Bauer (2000, Chapter 19) offer an in-depth treatment of quality issues in the context of qualitative data.
4.6 Ethical issues

4.6.1 Ethical guidelines

Research using human participants recognises that the environment in which we are placed can have a substantial impact on us – we respond to it in many ways, behaviourally and psychologically. Indeed, this responsiveness to the situation is the basic assumption behind experimental research in particular. Given this, it is essential that social psychological research carefully consider how participating in a study will have an impact on participants, not only regarding the dependent variables, but also in broader terms concerning their psychological state, welfare, and rights and expectations. The possibility that such participation might produce responses that are troublesome for participants seems likely to be high in social psychology, where the issues investigated can have significant emotional, personal, moral or political associations.

The principal way of taking these matters into account is by ensuring that social psychological research operate in accordance with a code of ethics which requires it to respect the dignity and rights of participants. Such codes vary across countries, but they tend to express the same general aims of not exposing participants to harm, obtaining appropriate consent from participants before they get involved in research and preserving their rights to privacy.


For instance, the BPS Code of human research ethics (2010) includes guidance on matters such as:

- Risk: participants should not be exposed to risk of harm (whether physical or psychological) when taking part in research. In addition, vulnerable or at-risk people should be excluded from research.

- Valid consent: participants should be given enough information about the study to be able to make a decision about whether or not they wish to participate. There should be no coercion or pressure brought to bear on people to make them participate, and participants should have the right to withdraw from a study at any point, without giving a reason and without facing any penalty, and to request that their data are not used. When conducting research with children under the age of 16, and for other persons where capacity to consent may be impaired, prior written consent must be obtained from parents or those with legal responsibility for the individual.

- Confidentiality: any information must be treated with confidentiality (i.e. not divulged to third parties without consent) unless otherwise agreed in advance, and should be held anonymously.

- Deception: deception should be avoided unless essential to the research objectives, if the research has strong scientific merit, and only if appropriate risk management and harm alleviation measures have been put in place.

- Debriefing: researchers should minimise any negative effects of their research on participants by providing a thorough debriefing at the end of the research, especially where deception has been employed. Where there is the possibility of more significant negative impacts (e.g. where participants have displayed significant distress), appropriate professional help should be provided.

The American Psychological Association (APA) has a similar set of criteria.
4.6.2 The use of deception in social psychological studies

Social psychologists face a particular problem because of their need sometimes to use deception – to conceal the true purpose of their studies from the participants. This is because knowing the true purpose of an investigation may change people’s behaviour.

Deception poses ethical problems because it is incompatible with the principle of valid or informed consent and its use remains controversial. On the one hand, it seems reasonable to deceive participants temporarily about the true purpose of a study, since it can serve to minimise the demand characteristics of the setting and help to avoid participants giving socially desirable or other artificial responses (see the discussion of validity and realism in Section 4.5.1). For example, in investigating the extent to which people hold racially prejudiced attitudes, telling participants about the topic under investigation is likely to result in their modifying their behaviour to avoid expressing attitudes that might give the experimenter a poor impression of them, or might in general seem socially undesirable.

On the other hand, deceiving participants does raise important ethical issues. There is always the possibility that the knowledge of having been deceived, even if it is only temporary, may have a detrimental psychological impact on participants, causing stress or other forms of discomfort. Moreover, there is the basic question of whether social psychologists are ever justified in telling lies to people even in the cause of scientific enquiry.

It seems very likely that some classic past studies in social psychology would not receive ethical clearance today. For example, the study of obedience to authority by Milgram (1964; see Section 12.11 for more detail), involved deceiving participants both about the purpose of the experiment and about the nature and consequences of their actions during it. Participants were members of the public who volunteered to take part, and who were not screened in any significant manner. Participants were informed that the study concerned how people learn simple lists of words, and they were led to believe that they had been randomly allocated to the position of a ‘teacher’ whose role was to improve the responses of a ‘learner’ by administering increasingly more intense electrical shocks to that learner. In fact, Milgram was not interested in the behaviour of the learner (who was a confederate of Milgram: the ‘random allocation’ was not random and it always assigned the participant to the role of teacher), but in the behaviour of the teacher. Milgram was interested in the extent to which the participants would continue to administer shocks to the learner, even as the intensity of the shock increased (to a maximum of 450 volts) and the reactions of the learner showed increasing harm. At 150 volts, the learner asked to be released from the study, and the experimenter told the teacher that they must carry on with the study. However, no shocks were actually administered by participants, even though they believed that they had done so. This brief description of Milgram’s design is sufficient to demonstrate the ethical issues at play: it is likely that participants experienced significant distress not only because of having (as they believed) been led to inflict pain on the learner, but also because they then discovered that they had been deceived about having done so.
Activity 4.3

Read the account of Milgram’s studies in Section 12.11.

• How do his studies achieve internal and external validity?

• Which of the ethical principles of the British Psychological Society outlined in Section 4.6.1 do those studies seem to contravene?

• Are there any ways you can think of to carry out research that would obtain valid results concerning obedience to authority without contravening these principles?

An interesting attempt to partially replicate Milgram's work was carried out by Burger (2009). He noted that those participants of Milgram's who were willing to administer shocks at the 150 volt level (i.e. when the learner first began to protest) were also very likely to go all the way to the highest level of 450 volts. That is, requiring the participants to administer shocks above 150 volts did not add much information regarding the willingness to obey, but did appear to add significantly to the distress of the participants. As a consequence, Burger's study used a maximum shock level of 150 volts. He also engaged in a very complex, multifaceted screening of participants to attempt to ensure that any vulnerable individuals were not recruited to take part. In these ways, the aim was to minimise the possibility of unacceptable levels of stress or harm. The results were comparable to Milgram's: while 79% of Milgram's participants believed they had administered shocks at and above 150 volts, 70% of Burger's believed that they had delivered shocks to the level of 150 volts.

Although social psychologists remain divided on the use of deception in their research, the majority view – as indicated by the ethical principles noted in Section 4.6.1 – is that temporary deception is acceptable, provided certain safeguards are met (Sharpe, Adair and Roese, 1992; Kimmel, 2011; Hertwig and Ortmann, 2008). Participants should be provided with as much information about the study as is feasible given the nature of the research questions being addressed, prior to taking part. In addition, debriefing should provide participants with a full explanation of the features of the study, including its true aims and the reasons for the need to use temporary deception. The basic guiding principle is that after the study, participants should be in the same or in a better mental state than before participating.

So, if the use of deception by Milgram was not acceptable (because it involved a design that also subjected participants to significant distress), was its use by Burger more acceptable (because the design created a significantly lower degree of distress, and because participants were more heavily screened)? The study received clearance from the ethics board of the university in which it took place. It will be evident that this is a complex area, where it is difficult to make blanket stipulations for all studies: the important issues for ethical judgement seem to lie in the interplay of detailed aspects of participant selection, research design and information made available to participants. The outcome needs to be carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis, informed by the kinds of ethical principles noted above.
Activity 4.4

Look back at the studies you outlined in answer to Activities 4.1 and 4.2.

- What kinds of ethical issues would arise in carrying them out?
- Would either study seem to require the use of deception?
- Is it possible to balance the need to fulfil appropriate ethical principles with the aim to obtain data that are not affected by participants' awareness of the issues under investigation? Or would you need to redesign the studies in order to avoid encountering ethical problems?

4.7 Overview

Conducting social psychological research involves going through a series of steps that, it is hoped, will help us to understand better the nature of the phenomenon in question. The type of understanding can range from seeking a detailed description of a given phenomenon, to assessing the strength of the relationship between two variables, to testing predictions about social behaviour. Each of the methods available to collect information will help us understand the issue of interest in a different way. In addition, each has various advantages and disadvantages and, as a rule, it is often advisable to conduct research using a variety of methods. The range of methods used in social psychology includes:

- laboratory experiments
- field experiments
- quasi-experimental research
- questionnaire surveys
- interviews and focus groups
- observational studies
- case studies
- analyses of media and texts.

In a laboratory experiment, participants are randomly assigned to experimental conditions, and one or more independent variables are manipulated to assess their impact on one or more dependent variables. Field experiments examine behaviours under different conditions but do not allow the experimenters full control over the independent variable. Surveys collect information by asking participants to answer a series of questions. Interviews and focus groups involve flexible interactions with participants to obtain detailed information from their own perspective. Observational studies involve systematic observation of people's behaviour, usually in everyday settings. Case studies use a combination of data sources to understand a particular organisation or setting. Analyses of media can be quantitative or qualitative, and aim to discern the content and patterns of the symbolic information circulating in society.

Whatever method is used, researchers need to be aware of the ethical issues they face and adhere to the guidelines designed to protect the well-being of research participants. The use of temporary deception, in order to prevent participants changing their behaviour and thereby invalidating the research findings, poses particular ethical questions for social psychology. However, most social psychologists consider that misleading participants about the true nature of a research study is permissible, on a temporary basis, where the benefits of its use outweigh the costs, and providing appropriate safeguards are adopted.
4.8 Key terms

These key terms will be useful as index entries or search terms if you choose to consult titles suggested as Further reading or other relevant texts or online sources. After completing the chapter and relevant reading, we suggest that you try to outline the essential features of each of the key terms listed below in order to check that you have understood the material. If you are unclear about any of the key terms listed, we suggest you go over the material again.

Research questions in social psychology

Laboratory experiments

Independent variable

Dependent variable

Field experiments

Quasi-experiments

Survey studies

Interviews/focus groups

Observational methods

Case studies

Quantitative data
Qualitative data

External validity

Internal validity

Mundane realism

Experimental realism

Demand characteristics

Experimenter effect

Double-blind procedure

Reliability

Replication

Research ethics

Deception

Valid consent
4.9 Reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

- outline the data-collection methods and research techniques available to social psychologists
- identify the key features, advantages and disadvantages of the various research methods
- discuss problems commonly encountered in conducting research
- describe the ethical issues facing social psychologists and evaluate their implications for psychological research.

4.10 Test your knowledge and understanding

1. When might ethical considerations hamper social psychological research?
2. What are internal and external validity and how are they related?
3. What factors need to be considered when designing and conducting a survey?
4. Outline the major research methods used in social psychology.